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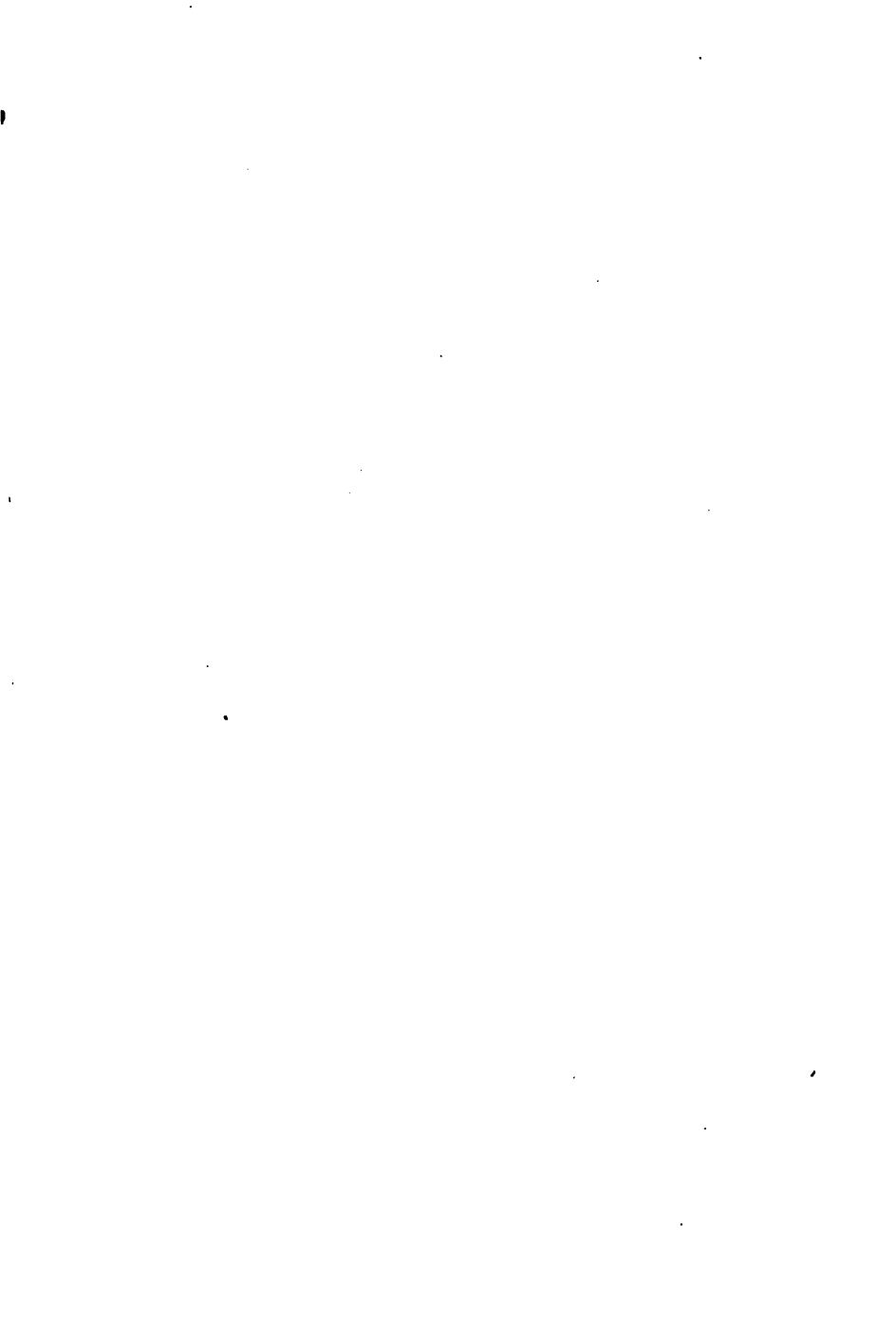
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**THE STORY BEHIND  
THE VERDICT**

*BY THE SAME AUTHOR*

FULL SWING

HEART OF A CHILD

CONCERT PITCH

LET THE ROOF FALL IN

PIGS IN CLOVER

BACCARAT

DR. PHILLIPS, Etc.



# THE STORY BEHIND THE VERDICT

BY

FRANK DANBY

Author of "Pigs in Clover," "Heart of a  
Child," etc.



NEW YORK  
DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY  
1915

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## INTRODUCTION

EVERYBODY both in and out of London, Rome, Paris, and Vienna knew or knew of the Keightley Wilburs. To begin with, their relationship was peculiar. To continue, so were they. Plutocrats, yet to be counted among the intellectuals; mother and son, yet lovers and intimate companions living together in a rare and perfect sympathy. Keightley wrote plays, poems, essays, professed Socialism and practised the occult. His mother dressed exquisitely, preserved her figure and complexion and played auction bridge with ardour. Each was tolerant of the other's hobbies. Their house in Carlton House Terrace, although not the largest, was certainly the most remarkable. For whilst their neighbours cherished eighteenth century masterpieces — Sir Joshuas, Romneys, Gainsboroughs, Hoppners — the Keightley Wilburs had accumulated a collection of Primitives, in comparison with which these were as interesting as modern Italian china.

Within the limited covers of one book it would be impossible to schedule, far less to describe, the valuables with which Keightley Wilbur and his mother were always surrounded, the aura in which they moved exquisitely and uniquely. There are

readers however for whom such description would have but limited value, to whom humanity has a stronger and deeper appeal than tradition; individuality than the most pregnant art. And it is for these the following stories have been gathered together. They represent one short phase in the evolution of Keightley Wilbur's psychology; the psychology of a young man of genius whose preciosity was almost sincere; a young man of taste who violated it perversely and often; a young man of sentiment who spent a lifetime in disguising that which he looked upon as a weakness.

Accident led him to his adventure into criminology, the weird little god of circumstance. It is not impossible that conscience kept him where he had been led. And the end would seem to confirm the surmise.

Certain it is that, until Pierre Lamotte came to his untimely end, Keightley Wilbur knew no more of coroners' courts than of Christian Science, and was as little interested in either. But after twelve jurymen had pronounced their verdict of accidental death upon his whilom friend and guest, his attention became riveted upon these petty inquisitions, and he discovered in them during the following few months a perpetual source of wonder and surprise, a fount of inspiration, even of romance. The coroners' courts for this short period provided him with abundance of material for his literary work, with comedy as well

as tragedy, and occasionally farce. The occult ceased to interest him. Socialism and Fabianism faded into insignificance. During this time he was heard perpetually asking why such a field should have been so neglected? He upbraided his journalistic friends for their supineness, urging his brother dramatists and novelists to join him in riding this new hobby.

Such an occurrence as the first related in this series could have had no similar effect on any other individual. But Keightley Wilbur was and remains different to the common run of men, and must not be judged from the ordinary standpoint.





## **THE STORY BEHIND THE VERDICT**



## CHAPTER I

### THE CASE OF PIERRE LAMOTTE

EXTRACT from a London evening paper :

“ At Windsor yesterday an inquiry was opened by the coroner (Mr. Morton Bull) into the death of Pierre Lamotte, the distinguished French dramatist, whose body was discovered at an early hour on Saturday morning, in the rushes by the ‘ Bells of Ouseley.’

“ Pierre Lamotte is known in England principally by *L'Ingénue*, an English version of which was produced by the Players' Society early in the season under the title of *The Flapper*. It will be remembered that considerable and somewhat acrimonious controversy ensued after this performance. Other works of his that have been translated are a volume of verse, which was well received by the critics; and a lurid romance entitled ‘ Half-Brothers,’ immediately placed on the *Index Expurgatorius* of the Library Association. We understand that Mr. Lamotte was in England on the present occasion in connection with *L'Ecrevisse*, now staged at the Odéon, and, according to rumour, to be seen at St. James's if ever the run of *Renegades* shows signs of

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having exhausted its popularity. At present there are no such signs.

"Mr. Lamotte, during his stay in England, was the guest of Keightley Wilbur, the young literary Mæcenas of Carlton House Terrace, who, it is understood, will be called to-morrow to throw what light is possible upon the mystery of his friend's death."

At the adjourned inquest, true to newspaper anticipation, the first witness called, after the necessary formalities had been gone through, was Mr. Keightley Wilbur. The court was crowded with literary celebrities and well-known people.

After being duly sworn, Mr. Wilbur said, in answer to questions:

"I am Keightley Wilbur, of Carlton House Terrace, author of 'The Nut's Progress,' 'Love,' and other pieces. I am also a playwright, and in my leisure hours I interest myself in sociology. Mr. Pierre Lamotte was my guest, but hardly my friend."

The coroner asked a little impatiently:

"You were intimate with him?"

"I have no intimates." He added, a little sentimentally, perhaps: "The great are always lonely."

It was later on mentioned in one of the illustrated papers that Mr. Wilbur gave all his evidence as if

he were aware that it would be reported verbatim; he held the court as an actor the stage, or a practised Parliamentarian the floor of St. Stephen's. This same enterprising illustrated paper, publishing his photograph, showed a rather thin and mobile visage, with black hair, smoothly brushed back and superabundant, a Jewish cast of countenance, not unlike that of the late Benjamin Disraeli. The witness spoke in a pleasantly modulated voice with a slight drawl.

"I am an Etonian; practically self-educated."

Mr. Bull directed him, somewhat abruptly, to answer the questions without interpolations. Keightley Wilbur smiled at the reporters and shrugged his shoulders.

"Since I left New College, Oxford, I have rented the houseboat, the *Marguerite*, moored between Datchet and Windsor. Yes, I have entertained there many distinguished English and foreign guests."

He then explained unnecessarily that he should hardly apply the word "distinguished" to Pierre Lamotte. He preferred to call him a "promising young writer."

It was easy to see the witness was irritating the coroner by the manner in which he gave his evidence.

"You know that the book he published here was withdrawn from circulation?"

"I wrote to him immediately after that lamen-

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table and absurd occurrence. I apologised on behalf of my country. Since then we have maintained a correspondence."

"Go on, please."

"When I heard that Mr. Lamotte proposed to visit England, I invited him to my house. He stayed with me last week, and we discussed *L'Ecrevisse*. It had been translated from the French, but I had to explain to him the necessity that it should be re-translated into English. Sir George Alexander, Lamotte, and I lunched together at my house on Thursday, and spent the afternoon arguing how to make the play sufficiently innocuous for the censor and the prurient purists without denuding it of value. Sir George was greatly concerned over this. Pierre Lamotte and I spoke of deodorisation, and advised him to call in a chemist's assistant."

There was some laughter in the court, immediately and sternly suppressed by the coroner, who threatened to have the court cleared.

In continuation, Keightley Wilbur said that, after the long interview with Sir George, he and Pierre Lamotte went down together from Paddington by the 5.5 to Windsor, arriving at 6.3. It was a beautiful evening; they changed into flannels, and sat in the dinghy talking about Puritanism and the play, until it was time to dress for dinner.

"Was there anyone else upon the houseboat — any servants or visitors?"

"There were two ladies, my Japanese valet who waited upon us, and, I believe, a couple of female servants — a cook and something that is called either a tweeny or a slavey."

In answer to a juryman the coroner said the two ladies and the servants were in court, and would be called in due course.

Keightley Wilbur answered the remaining questions put to him in a somewhat bored manner. He seemed to have lost interest in the affair.

"We dined. I don't know what we drank. Kito may be able to tell you. Not much, I should think; we were all abstemious. The ladies may have had champagne. Afterwards there was a little music. Madame Bosquet played to us; Miss Blaney sang. It was all very agreeable."

"Was there any other visitor?"

"Dr. Nicholson pulled up after dinner, moored his boat alongside, and came on board."

"How long did he remain?"

"About half an hour, I should think."

"Then the singing and playing were resumed until ——"

"I make a point of never knowing the time."

The answer annoyed the coroner, who made a remark intended to be sarcastic. Mr. Wilbur replied,

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pertinently, or impertinently, and there was a sharp little exchange of epigrams that kept the reporters busy. When matters became normal again Mr. Bull asked sarcastically :

"Perhaps you will not mind telling the court if you and Mr. Lamotte sat up later than the ladies?"

"I am pleased to oblige the court with the information. I trust my meaning will not be misconstrued. We retired practically simultaneously."

Mr. Bull ignored the innuendo, and asked :

"During the evening had there been a quarrel or dispute, or any break in the harmony?"

"There was certainly one break in the harmony."

The jury leaned forward, the reporters sharpened their pencils, and Mr. Bull felt pleased with himself for his question.

"Go on, please."

"One of the strings of the piano gave way; the G of the third octave, I believe."

The laughter gurgled again, and again Mr. Bull said he would not permit these exhibitions, rebuking Mr. Wilbur for his flippancy. Mr. Wilbur said wearily that he had been answering futile questions for over an hour.

"You can throw no further light on the case?"

"That, I understand, is your affair."

He was told he could stand down. The hour was late, and the court adjourned until the next day. In the meantime the jury were taken to see the house-



boat and the room in which Mr. Lamotte had slept.

The *Marguerite* was one of the best boats on the river, luxuriously fitted; the drawing-room in Chinese style with hanging lamps that tinkled musically, black satin divans and embroidered cushions. Many-coloured Chinese glass pictures were on the walls and fine kakemonos. The dining-room was Florentine, and the bedrooms merely comfortable. There was nothing on the boat to suggest tragedy.

The tender was also visited, and found to contain kitchen and servants' accommodation of the most commonplace description. Two of the three bedrooms in the *Marguerite* had been occupied by the ladies. The third, from the window of which the unfortunate French dramatist was supposed to have walked into the river, was nearest to the dining-room.

The first witness called after the adjournment was Kito, the Japanese manservant. He was intelligent and non-committal, short of stature and speech. He said he had heard nothing in the nature of a disagreement whilst waiting at dinner. When he had cleared away, placed the tantalus and glasses on the dining-room table, and put out the silver box filled with Sandorides Lucana Turkish cigarettes, his work for the evening was over. Mr. Wilbur never kept him up when he had guests. He knew nothing of what happened between ten o'clock that night, when

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he went to bed as usual, and nine o'clock the next morning when the police came, and he woke his master.

The two ladies who followed Kito into the witness-box added little to the story.

Madame Bosquet, a Frenchwoman, whose evidence had to be translated, was very voluble and a little incoherent, about thirty-five years of age, with white hair surmounting a young face, a little made-up, but still beautiful. Her eyes were soft and dark, and she was admirably dressed. She described a pleasant evening, charming company, and said vehemently that between such men as her eminent host and his no less eminent guest no possible cause of friction could have arisen. She added that anything of the nature of a struggle would have been impossible without herself or Miss Blaney becoming aware of it. The bedrooms were all quite close.

Here formal evidence was asked for and given as to whether Mr. Lamotte had occupied his room. The bed had certainly been slept in, was disarranged, and had not been made tidy when the police made their matutinal visit. The French windows, reaching to the floor, were wide open. There was no disorder in the room.

Ellaline Blaney, who was pale and fair and frightened, exquisitely pretty, and understood to be upon the stage, said "Yes" or "No" to every question put to her, and seemed not to understand

the significance of any of them. The climax came when she was gently interrogated as to the length of her acquaintance with Mr. Wilbur, and the nature of it. She was understood to say he had been very kind to her, and paid for her singing lessons. She then burst into tears, became hysterical, and was allowed to step down.

The cook and the soiled little maid-of-all-work talked a great deal and said nothing. They had both heard noises in the night, and one of them had dreamt of calamity. They knew neither Mr. Wilbur nor any of the guests by sight, having been engaged by Kito.

"An' a very civil an' obligin' gentleman he is, although coloured, which I couldn't hev believed if I 'adn't seed it for meself. If you'll excuse me, I'd like to tell you how he mended the big fish-kettle——"

The coroner did excuse her, and from the box, cutting her reminiscences short. Then he said:

"Gentlemen, have you heard enough, or do you wish to adjourn for the attendance of the visitor, Dr. Nicholson, who looked in for half an hour and listened to the music? I have a letter from him in which he asks to be excused if possible. He is on the panel, and has many poor patients in this district and in Hurley. I do not propose to bring him from his work unless you, gentlemen, think it necessary."

The jury of petty tradesmen, recruited from the

neighbourhood, had already been two days away from business, and the rate of remuneration was low. They were unanimous in not wishing to adjourn for the attendance of Dr. Nicholson, and were then shepherded by the coroner into finding a verdict.

They found that *Monsieur Pierre Lamotte had met his death by drowning, but how he got into the river there was no evidence to show.*

Mr. David Devenish had a trenchant leader the next day in the *Daily Grail*, commenting upon the inconclusiveness of this verdict and finding fault with the way the proceedings had been conducted.

The article went on, after saying that the matter could not end there:

“The only evidence that might have proved of value was the evidence that was not called. From Dr. Nicholson we might have learnt, for instance, whether he had observed any excitement in manner, any irregularity in the pupils, any cerebral or locomotor symptoms to account for the action of Pierre Lamotte that led to his death. Was he a sleep-walker? Was any illness looked for, or only abrasions? Why was there not a complete autopsy made instead of a partial one?”

The article aroused a certain amount of attention, and several people wrote letters. Others expressed their views in clubs and at suburban dinners. But

nothing, of course, was done, and within a few weeks Pierre Lamotte's death ceased to have any interest for the general public.

The next incident that occurred bearing in any way upon the tragedy was that Dr. Nicholson, the panel doctor who had visited the houseboat, was removed from his position owing to a bad mistake he made with a patient when himself under the influence of drink or some drug.

David Devenish, happening to meet Keightley Wilbur at the Savoy grill, heard that Dr. Nicholson had written to him asking for assistance, and was shown Keightley's reply, of which he was evidently rather proud:

"That you have not the smallest claim upon my benevolence makes it agreeable to me to bestow it. Herewith a cheque, which will be repeated monthly until you have your inevitable delirium tremens, or I receive the Nobel Prize for my contributions to English literature. The circumstances having no relation to each other, must be considered together. . . ."

When David Devenish left the restaurant he found himself wondering about this laboured letter, why it had been shown him, and why Wilbur should give Dr. Nicholson an allowance. Keightley Wilbur was very rich, and, of course, known to be liberal to his friends. But the last person in the world whom one would have thought could be counted among

Keightley Wilbur's friends was a panel doctor. David's mind was naturally a suspicious one, and his paper was always on the outlook for sensational matter. Keightley Wilbur was still unclassified in the ordered pigeon-holes where dwelt the putative and premature obituaries of prominent men. David Devenish thought of him as something of a genius, if something of a charlatan; a cinematograph show of a youngster, coruscating fitfully and brilliantly. Nevertheless, he had a certain tolerant liking for him, accentuated by the knowledge that Keightley more than returned his feeling. It was in the *Daily Grail*, in an article written by David himself, that Keightley received his first Press recognition and "The Nut's Progress" the impetus that sped its sales into six figures. The two men frequented the same places — the Garrick Club and the Savoy grill-room, the Saville, and first nights at the theatres. Keightley was literary and David merely journalistic, but there was a certain community of interests between them. Therefore, although David was suspicious, and believed that Keightley knew more about Pierre Lamotte's death than he had told the coroner, he made no definite attempt to confirm his suspicions.

Eighteen months after the death of Pierre Lamotte, David Devenish met, for the first time, Miss Ellaline Blaney, lately returned from com-

pleting her musical education in Paris, and already engaged for the new musical comedy about which all the papers were full.

At nineteen, when seen in the coroner's court as a witness in the Lamotte case, Ellaline had been merely a pretty girl with fair hair, blue eyes, and lovely little teeth. At twenty-one, after the advantages of eighteen months in Paris and one or two at the Odéon, her outlines refined, grace added to her beauty, she had all the exotic charm of a super supper cat. David succumbed — succumbed utterly, to the great entertainment of his many friends and the undisguised and sympathetic amusement of Keightley Wilbur.

But David Devenish was not the man to take lightly even a love affair with a Gaiety girl. Within three weeks of the first meeting he asked Ellaline to marry him. /

She told Keightley of this proposal on the following Sunday. He had come to fetch her for a motor drive, but the luxurious flat in Ashley Gardens was full of fog, and their intentions halted. It was after they had discussed the weather, last night's audience, and one or two other topical questions, that Ellaline came out with her astonishing news:

"David Devenish has asked me to marry him."

"No! Brave boy! And, of course, you said 'Yes'?"

Keightley flung himself on the sofa and seemed highly diverted. Ellaline was offended at the way he took her news.

"Why shouldn't I?" she said.

"Why, indeed?"

Between the fog and the red glow of the fire her fair hair shone like a will-o'-the-wisp in marsh land.

"I'd like to know what you'd do if I took you at your word."

"Try me!"

There was laughter in his eyes when he looked at her, and she broke into angry speech:

"You think you can do and say what you like with me! I've half a mind to show you——"

"Half a mind! You think you have as much as that altogether?"

"I'm not going to be made fun of."

"But if you persist in being so amusing?"

"Perhaps you wouldn't care if I did say 'Yes' — if I did marry David Devenish?"

"Indeed I should. I should mind very much." He was emphatic, and she softened at once, would have spoken, but that he went on too quickly: "I am attached to David. I am under a very serious obligation to him. He explained me to a slow world. But for David I might be still published in special editions, calf bound, and paid for by myself. Certainly I should object to your marrying David."

"You are trying to insult me."



"Are you going to make a scene?" he asked politely, as if entertained by the idea, and curious.

She burst into tears and voluble, incoherent reproaches. He listened attentively, but soon became bored.

"You are saying exactly the things every woman has said from time immemorial. There isn't even 'copy' in it." His calmness and indifference enraged her, and she broke out:

"Well! I could say very different ones if I chose."

"Could you? Then I wish you would. You are very good-looking, and improving in your stage work, but I must point out to you that your conversation lacks originality."

"You know what I *could* talk about!" she said savagely.

"Cosmetics, and the necessity of distilled water for the complexion?"

"Of something you would not like anybody to know," she answered angrily, watching him, nevertheless, as if to see how he would take the blow.

"And what is that?" he asked imperturbably.

"Of what happened that night on board the *Marguerite*."

He looked at her, surprised, and then interested.

"Of course," he answered, "of course. The very thing. I had forgotten all about it. Yes, you must tell David. You or I must tell him. That will do

the trick, I expect. I should make a better story of it than you——”

“What do you mean? I needn’t tell him if I don’t choose.”

“David is really a remarkable person, full of prejudices, yet with an underlying sentimentality that can rise and veil him as the fog veils this room.”

He spoke as if to himself, as if he had no auditor, and was experimenting with phrases as he did in the solitude of his own library. “Yes, the story must be told,” he went on thoughtfully.

She said rudely, but a little uneasily:

“That’s what you call ‘bluffing,’ I suppose?”

He roused himself from his mood, and observing her uneasiness, began to tease her.

“That is it; you have guessed it, of course. One can always trust the quick wit of a chorus girl. What you must do now is to call my bluff. Send for David; ring him up on the telephone.”

“I’ve half a mind to do it.”

“I suppose you really *are* unaware that you have only half a mind altogether, or rather less? Tell me, now, have you been thinking all these months that you had a hold over me?”

He smiled at her and settled himself more comfortable on the sofa, nursing his leg and continuing to talk. “Did you think I sent you to Paris to get you out of the way, to keep you quiet? Go on; tell me all of your thoughts.”

"You are a perfect devil. I don't believe you care about anything or anybody. Mr. Devenish is as different as possible."

"Of course I am different from anybody else. Haven't you found that out before? What a quaint, absurd little person you are; not real at all. If I had invented you I should have invented you just as you are."

She was half crying, and said chokingly:

"I believe you'd be glad to get rid of me."

"No. You are not in the least in my way. Sometimes you please me extremely."

"If I say 'Yes' to David I shall tell him everything. I couldn't marry and keep such a secret from him."

"Couldn't you? I didn't know."

"You do nothing but jeer at me."

"Don't you believe it. I am feeling very sympathetic to you, and a little grateful. You are showing me the mechanism of the transpontine melodrama mind in working order."

"I wish you were dead."

"Do you really care for me as much as that?"

"I hate you."

"I know — they always do. And because you love me and hate me, hardly knowing which, I shall have to intervene and save you from marrying that good fellow David Devenish."

"He won't think *you* a good fellow when I tell him what I know about you."

"Won't he? I am not sure."

"You won't laugh presently."

"Are you about to consign me to a cold and 'ke-ruel' jail? Shall I go forth from this warm and wicked flat with gyves upon my wrists. It is a wicked flat, by the way, and will be so described in the evening papers."

She did not understand him in the least, but he succeeded presently in goading her to the telephone.

"Westminster 4638! Are you there? Is that Mr. Devenish's flat? Oh, I didn't know it was you. I wish you'd come round here."

Obviously, David Devenish expressed himself overjoyed at the invitation.

"Now? Oh, yes! whenever you like. No, I don't know about lunch."

She hung up the receiver and said excitedly to Keightley:

"He'll be here in ten minutes. What are you going to do?"

"Do? What am I going to do? Why, stay and criticise your skill as a *raconteuse*, of course. What did you expect me to do? Little idiot! Come here." He smiled, making room for her on the sofa. She hesitated, and then, as if hypnotised, went over to him slowly. "That's right. One gets a sense

of purring pleasure out of you sometimes, after all." There was an interval, during which he kissed her, played with her a little. He was amazingly attractive to women, and this one was particularly easy. Afterwards he said: "But what have you, and such as you, to do with marriage? That's not your affair at all."

"David adores me." She pouted.

"David knows nothing about women."

"You are very unkind."

But she nestled against him, nevertheless, for she was of that easy type. And he went on caressing her carelessly.

"I thought you didn't care for me any more," she whispered.

"You are a harp upon which I no longer play, an exquisite eighteenth-century harpsichord. Tell me, do your strings still vibrate for me?"

"You were ever so much nicer before I went to Paris." She nestled closer.

"Was I? I don't think I could ever have been more tolerant. This coat will never be wearable again; the mixture of cream and powder you are depositing upon it defies even turpentine. Is it your idea, by the way, that David Devenish should discover us in this attitude; that with your head upon my shoulder you will tell him your ger-r-uesome tale?"

"I forgot he was coming. I don't want to tell him anything. Can't I say I'm out; that I've changed my mind?"

But already the bell rang. The fog had thickened, and through it David Devenish's voice was heard in the hall.

He came in with both hands extended. But seemed surprised to see Keightley lounging familiarly on the sofa, and pulled himself up shortly.

Ellaline, who had risen before his entry, began quickly to talk about the fog, saying mendaciously and unnecessarily that Keightley had only just come in. David felt at once that there was something in the atmosphere, tense and unexpected, to which Keightley Wilbur's presence was the cue. Keightley was self-possessed and appeared amused.

"She sent for me to consult me as to your proposal. I stand *in loco parentis* to her, as you possibly know."

A faint colour showed in David's face, but he made no other sign of anger.

"I understand you have been helpful to her," he said stiffly, without any indication of feeling.

"The fact is," Keightley drawled — he seemed to be enjoying himself, which was certainly not the case with either of the others — "we are both of us a little uncertain as to whether, before answering 'Yes' or 'No' she ought not to tell you a certain story. . . ."

"I don't know what he is talking about," she interrupted, going over to the fireplace, speaking in nervous haste. "Don't listen to him, David; he is only gassing."

"My words are the words of wisdom. Listen, Devenish . . ."

"If it is Miss Blaney's pleasure?"

"Whether it is Miss Blaney's pleasure or not. But you like to hear me talk, don't you, Ellaline?"

"No, I don't," she answered shortly.

There was an interchange of uncomplimentary sentences between them. David felt irritated, and wished Keightley would be silent. He had not expected to meet him here to-day, and was embarrassed, as any man would be under the circumstances. But in a minute his ear caught the name of Pierre Lamotte, and then his attention was riveted. Since he had fallen so incongruously in love, he had forgotten his suspicions and all the details of the inquest. Now he remembered, and quite suddenly he feared what it was that Keightley insisted upon telling him.

After Ellaline had exhausted her attempts to prevent Keightley speaking, she relapsed into a sullen silence.

When Keightley began it was as if he were talking to himself again, as if neither of them were there. David remained standing all the time the story was

being told, and Ellaline crouched before the fire. Keightley had the gift of arresting attention.

"Dusk, and the evening stars. Curious to recall them here in the fog. I always knew I should one day tell the story of how Pierre Lamotte came by his death. But I thought it would have been in verse. . . ."

He paused for a moment, sighed a little affectedly, and went on:

"The river that evening was a sheet of silver until the mist rose, and then everything became a little unreal and mystic, exquisitely beautiful. We sat in the dinghy, Pierre Lamotte and I, and talked about literature — literature and art. Pierre told me again, as he had told me so many times before, of visions he had seen under opium, of rivers to which this one was a mere muddy stream, of mists on mountain tops dissolving to show a glorious dawn, of the red sun rising on snow-clad peaks. We spoke of the experiment that was to be made after dinner.

"I had never taken opium, and neither had Ellaline. Claudine Bosquet was an expert. Nicholson was coming to show us two amateurs how it was done, and how we could obtain the greatest effect. Claudine talked to Ellaline about it in a hushed voice in the drawing-room, whilst Pierre told me in the dinghy. Nicholson had lived in Paris, was known to Pierre, had once attended him when



he had gone too far in his favourite pastime, and lay insensible for a day and a half.

"I was excited at the prospect. I talked well that night at dinner. Gad! how well I talked! Afterwards, whilst we were waiting for Nicholson, Claudine played the piano and Ellaline sang. The piano had been pushed into the dining-room. Kito meanwhile prepared the drawing-room for the coming *séance*.

"In the drawing-room the big black divans were heaped with cushions, there were no chairs; dull red matting was on the floor, no lights but one small lamp, modern, but of antique design; beside it lay a copper tray and four opium pipes. The women were in loose white gowns, Pierre and I in smoking suits. One side of the drawing-room was open to the river; the mist was still rising — a wet, white mist — and we heard Nicholson's boat without seeing it, a mysterious splash of oars and lapping of waters. Nicholson, when he came on board, would not let us talk. He arranged us in the opium attitude, so that our dreams should be of Paradise. Ellaline was to lie beside me, her head in the hollow of my hip; Madame Bosquet in the same way with Pierre.

"Ellaline was desperately nervous, and I could feel she was cold through her thin, loose clothes. Nicholson cooked over the lamp, like a strange

Aladdin; the opium seethed and bubbled; he moulded it with his fingers into little balls, placing them in the pipes, handing them to us, one after the other, without saying a word.

"I had hardly taken my first whiff, and Ellaline, I believe, had made but a coughing pretence, when I saw Pierre get up. Then everything became rather hazy, and all I remember was the tangle of stars, and that the mist lifted. So I drifted into Nirvana. I loved my Ellaline and all the beautiful world; wonderful illuminating phrases came to me, and I saw into the heart of things. There were vases filled with exotic flowers, exquisite warm scents and sounds of music, shapes, half divine, of women and children floated before me . . ."

He paused for a moment as if remembering. Then in a sudden change of mood went on:

"Now, Ellaline, I have given you a start. Tell us what happened next. You had one whiff. . . ."

She took up the tale from him, but when she spoke it was as if she were speaking in her sleep — speaking through suggestion, and involuntarily.

"I did not really inhale it; I was frightened of the drug, and of the whole thing. I never wanted to do it, but you persuaded me. You could have persuaded me to anything then."

"And now," he put in, smiling lightly. David made an impatient gesture, and Ellaline went on as if she had noticed no interruption.

"I hated the smell of the pipes, and I was cold and uncomfortable. Then you fell asleep ——"

"Not quite."

"You seemed fast asleep, and I slid out of your arms and got up. Madame Bosquet was sleeping, too, but Mr. Lamotte was standing looking at the river. We watched Dr. Nicholson get into his boat and row off . . ." She stopped abruptly, and it was Keightley presently who continued the narrative.

"You stood a long time beside Pierre, and at first he talked poetry, but found you unresponsive. At dinner he had paid you compliments, and your bridling had led him to think you were open to his advances. They don't understand your methods in Paris, your insatiable vanity and desire for indiscriminate admiration, your fickle, futile flirtatiousness. David, here, does not understand, either. Nobody in England but I knows the soul of the dancer, of the light woman who is nevertheless virtuous, who will take everything but gives nothing; who never loves, but sometimes feebly desires. You liked Pierre's compliments; were proud to score off Claudine, off me, even, a little. Perhaps you thought of an engagement in the new play; of advancing in your profession. But most probably you never thought at all when you sat down in the deck-chair with Pierre beside you, whilst he told you how lovely you were, and that he had become madly

enamoured of you, that you must go back to Paris with him. . . .

"Claudine slept on, I slept on, dreaming exquisitely. You and Pierre talked under the stars. The hour got late, and later. . . ."

Now the girl on the hearthrug covered her face with her hands — the fire had caught her cheeks. David saw the sudden scarlet.

"My pipe got cold and went out. I was conscious of my surroundings, a little dreamy still. But, of course, when I am half asleep I am wider awake than most people. Madame Bosquet roused herself, and said she would finish her sleep in bed. You came over and stood beside me, asked if it was as nice as I had anticipated. You were nervous and excited. Pierre's love-making had gone a little beyond what you intended or expected. As far as you were capable of caring for anyone, you cared for me, and your move towards me was for protection — protection against the danger you yourself had brought about. Pierre followed you; stood beside you looking down at me. He asked if I had had enough; said he could fill me another pipe, knew how to do it as well as Nicholson. I held out my hand — it was really for yours — but he put the pipe into it, went over to the tray, warmed a little pellet over the flame of the lamp, came back and dropped it into the pipe I held ——"

"You went to sleep again," she interrupted hastily.

"No."

"He said we must leave you undisturbed — that it would be dangerous to wake you."

"You were frightened of Pierre by now — a little frightened, but flattered, flattered by the passion with which your beauty had inspired him; your beauty and your complaisance! Even then you could not tell him straightforwardly and definitely that you were playing with him, that you meant nothing. You relied upon — Heaven only knows upon what you relied.

"You moved away again, and now I only feigned to inhale my pipe. I had heard his amorous whispers, seen your moist, half-opened lips and shining, startled eyes. I think I must have slept again nevertheless. When I woke the stars were no longer in the heavens, and there was nothing but grey river mists and the water lip-lapping against the sides of the boat. It was then I heard your frightened cry."

Her head sunk lower. David had the inclination to lay his hand upon it, upon the soft yellow of its dishevelment.

"Need we have any more of this?" he said.

"Does it bore you?" Keightley asked, apparently surprised. "I thought I was telling the story rather

well. It's new stuff, you will admit, won't you? Opium parties were very common in Paris that season — quite the rage amongst the intellectuals. I thought you would like to hear about this one; it was very picturesque and original — the boat and the river, and all that. I had a terrific headache the next day, I remember, and did not get rid of it until Kito mixed me some specific of his own. Kito is very near to being a physician. I never can understand how you do without a man," he said carelessly to Devenish, getting up from the sofa, stretching himself, and going to the window.

"The fog is worse than ever. I don't know how we are going to get to the Ritz. One can't see across the road now. It's a real Whistler nocturne. There's the reflection of a yellowish light from some window, and the gleam of the street lamp at the corner; the rest is almost opaque."

He appeared to expect they would come to him, join him, in looking out.

David sat down on one of the easy-chairs by the fireside. As the girl crouched on the hearthrug it seemed as if she were at his knee. His impulse was to protect her, although he was chilled and repelled. He wished to condemn Keightley, but involuntarily he put himself in his place, and felt that the only difference between them was that in hot rage he might have killed the Frenchman who had abused his hospitality; put two hands upon his throat

and throttled him. But Keightley, more coldly and deliberately, had flung him into the river, as any man would have flung him from out of a house, from under a roof where he had betrayed his host. He saw the scene that must have taken place between the two men, and how it had come about; thinking, too, of the good name of the girl at his feet, and how it would be imperilled if it were ever known how Pierre Lamotte came by his death. He remembered his newspaper, knowing full well that this news would never reach his readers.

Keightley, when he left the window, said shivering:

"It is brutally cold. You might stir the fire into a blaze, Ella."

"I don't know why you have told me this," David said heavily, after another pause.

"Don't you?" Ellaline had not moved. "Neither do I."

Then he looked from one to the other, shrugged his shoulders slightly, smiled:

"You won't think me rude if I leave you now, will you? I want to see how the light of St. Stephen's shows from the Embankment. I am sorry I bored you."

David rose and faced him.

"Why have you told me that story to-day, Wilbur?"

"I wonder," Keightley answered. His eyes met

David's, and so they remained for the space of an instant. Then David sat down again, and Keightley went out, closing the door quietly behind him.

"What actually happened?" David found himself asking when he was alone with Ellaline after Keightley had gone.

"He threw him out."

"Out of the boat! Without knowing he could swim — whether he could swim or not?"

She answered a little sulkily, but watching him under her lowered lids:

"He had insulted me!"

David sat silent a moment.

"The death penalty!" he said under his breath, but looking at her beauty, appraising it, thinking the price men paid, feeling himself mean, perhaps. Then it was as if she coaxed, or pleaded:

"The tender was just behind; there was a boat moored to the side. We were not a yard from the shore."

"Neither of you looked to see what had become of him?"

"I was too frightened. I never thought that — that he — that he would be drowned. Keightley was so — so quiet — and — and so cool. Afterwards he said, in a sort of polite way, that he hoped I would be able to sleep now, and that he was sorry I had been disturbed. 'If Pierre returns it will be



as young Henry,' he said, and quoted something about a ghost :

“ ‘No eye beheld when Edmund plunged  
Young Henry in the stream.’ ”

“ I don't think he quite knew what he was doing ; I did not know what he meant. You don't blame me, do you ? ” she asked anxiously.

“ No, no ; certainly not,” replied David quickly, if without conviction.

David Devenish and Ellaline Blaney are not married. Rumour has it that she continues to refuse him because she does not wish to leave the stage. But rumour, of course, is a lying jade. They sup together frequently at the Savoy grill-room, and people talk about them. The *Daily Grail* has published nothing further about the Lamotte case, although it continues to criticise the findings of coroners' juries with some virulence.

## CHAPTER II

### THE ARBUTHNOT CASE

THERE is no doubt that for a short time after the death of Pierre Lamotte Keightley Wilbur suffered from restlessness, from a depression that took the form of an immense volubility and an inability to settle to regular work. His mother, who knew no more than Press and public of what lay behind the inconclusive verdict in that strange case, thought the loss of his friend, and the possible slur upon his hospitality, were sufficient to account for the alteration she found in him. She suggested change of air and scene, and so was responsible directly or indirectly for the sojourn to Paris, and the intimacy with Georges Carpenter, of which more hereafter. If his stay in the great capital synchronised also with that of Ellaline Blaney, Mrs. Wilbur knew nothing to connect the two circumstances, and in any case would have been too discreet to inquire. She was satisfied six months later to receive her beloved back in Carlton House Terrace, a little thinner, perhaps, but entirely restored to his habitual serenity of whimsical demeanour.

Soon after his return, however, she began to notice

his interest in cases in the coroners' courts. True to herself and her methods with him, she appeared to find nothing strange in his going from Westminster to St. Martin's, from the City to St. Pancras, to listen to the most sordid description of how this or the other unknown, or too well known derelict, came by his or her wretched end. He could talk of nothing else during their hours together but how some child who had died suddenly was accused of meningitis, whilst Keightley suspected she was a case of poisoned rabbit, carefully prepared by a mother who had previously insured her; of how some habitual drunkard, picked up in the street, was found to have died of "natural causes," although he himself had more than a suspicion that a worn-out wife or an ill-treated son or daughter had hastened matters by tightening a necktie, or refraining from disturbing a fatal position.

Mrs. Wilbur shuddered and expressed a great disgust at the things she heard, but never a want of interest, since it was Keightley who related them. It was not until he became absorbed in the Arbuthnot case that she entered a protest, which proved inefficacious, except in so far as it kept the Mornington Ransby matter from home consumption. She never made the same mistake after that.

The Arbuthnot case filled the public mind for a long time, but that it presented unusual features Keightley had realised even in the first hearing, and

before the adjournment, when the evidence was disclosed that made such an extraordinary sensation.

This preliminary inquiry was heard at Westminster, by Mr. Turner, a friend of Keightley's, who related to him the incident that marked the pause before the adjourned inquiry. The first part of the story can best be told in the bald language of the newspaper report.

"At the 'City Arms' yesterday, the coroner, Mr. G. H. Turner, opened an inquest on the body of Leonard Hobbs, a schoolboy, who met his death under very distressing circumstances.

"Mr. Turner, addressing the jury, told them the facts were not in dispute. The boy had been sent home from a preparatory school at Broadstairs in order to undergo a slight operation — the removal of tonsils and adenoids. This was done by Dr. Harkness, of Grosvenor Street, assisted by Dr. Grainger, who administered chloroform, both thoroughly competent and careful physicians. They would hear that the boy's mother undertook the little nursing that was required, and, after having spent the day by his side, remained with him during the night. The boy was of a nervous disposition, and a composing draught had been left for him, to be used if required. About two o'clock in the morning he became exceedingly restless, and his mother pre-

pared to give him the medicine. Unfortunately, she gave him instead a large dose of carbolic disinfectant that stood near it in a somewhat similar bottle. The mistake was discovered almost immediately, the doctors summoned, and every remedy tried. But without avail. The boy died the following day. The doctor would attend before them and give the result of the post-mortem examination, and he would be compelled also to call the mother. Mr. Turner asked the jury to be as considerate as possible. This was an only son and the occasion a very sad and trying one for her.

"Mrs. Arbuthnot was then called.

"Mrs. Arbuthnot hardly looked old enough to be the mother of a boy of twelve. She was slight and fair, very pale, and seemed terribly nervous. She gave her evidence in a low voice that was occasionally almost inaudible:

" 'I am Ethel Arbuthnot. I have been married twice. Leonard was my only son. The operation took place in the dining-room, which had been prepared on purpose. I was with him the whole time. He was under chloroform; but there was a great deal to be done in getting hot water, holding and emptying basins, waiting on the doctors. He lost a great deal of blood. I was very worried, but not unequal to what I had to do. Afterwards he was carried into my own room. I felt tired and exhausted, and the first part of the night my husband

sat up with me. He gave me a small glass of brandy and soda before he left. I don't think I slept at all, but I may have. I was awake when Lennie began to get restless and talk. He complained that his throat was sore and that he had a headache. He wanted to get out of bed, and asked me to switch on the electric light and give him a book. He said he was sure he should not sleep again and that he felt sick. It was the condition that Dr. Harkness had anticipated. The electric light was not on; there was only a night-light in the room. I had been sitting by the bed, and got up to fetch the medicine——'

"Here she stopped abruptly, grew very white, and seemed as if she was about to faint. A murmur of sympathy ran through the court, and Mr. Turner suggested she might like to rest a little while whilst he called the medical evidence. Her husband assisted her out of the court, and she was heard sobbing in the passage.

"'One of the saddest cases I have been called upon to investigate,' the coroner remarked feelingly.

"Dr. Harkness said the boy was strong and healthy, apart from the natural nervousness about the operation. He admitted that he did not usually operate without a professional nurse in attendance; but this was the slightest operation known, little more serious than the extraction of a tooth. Mrs. Arbuthnot gave them most efficient help. He was a surgeon and physician, in general practice. The

carbolic was ordered by him, a solution of one in ten. It was for sterilising his instruments. He had not used it, however, as he came straight from home, and they were already sterilised. He saw the bottle of carbolic, but his impression was that it was much larger and of a different shape from the one that contained the bromide. It was by his instructions that the room was kept dark. Mrs. Arbuthnot suggested a nightlight, and he thought it a good idea. He was sent for again at three in the morning.

“He then related the symptoms of the young patient, the remedies used, and their effect. He said that from the first the case was seen to be hopeless, and all he and two doctors they called in could do was to relieve the suffering with opiates. Mrs. Arbuthnot was naturally in acute distress. She kept begging them wildly to try different remedies. Toward the end she fell into a violent attack of hysteria, completely losing control of herself, and had to be restrained from drinking the remainder of the carbolic. They all thought the hysteria might develop into actual mania, and after consultation decided to give her a morphia injection. He had seen her every day since then, but was not yet completely satisfied as to her mental condition. He hoped Mr. Turner would see his way to shorten her ordeal in the witness-box as much as possible.

“Dr. Grainger, after having been sworn, said he

administered chloroform to Leonard Hobbs, whilst Dr. Harkness performed the simple operation known as guillotining the tonsils, afterwards removing two small adenoids. The whole thing took less than twenty minutes, and he was out of the house half hour after he had entered it. He never saw a bottle of carbolic, but carbolic was used to sterilise all surgical instruments. He knew nothing of Dr. Harkness's prescription of bromide, nor anything further of the case until he received the coroner's summons.

"At this juncture Mr. Arbuthnot returned, and intimated to the coroner that his wife was ready to resume her evidence.

"Mr. Gerald Arbuthnot was obtrusively well dressed, and somewhere about forty years of age. His forehead retreated, and his chin also, leaving nothing prominent but his nose and mouth. The shape of his face gave him a hawklike appearance, a moulting hawk, for his hair was scant. He looked gentlemanly and exceedingly stupid, and nothing he said contradicted his appearance.

"Mrs. Arbuthnot now commanded herself sufficiently to tell how, in the dim light, she had taken the bottle from the mantelpiece, not knowing or remembering there was another there. But she grew more and more excited as she went on:

" 'He said it was nasty and smelt horrid, that it burnt his mouth. I made him take it, *I made him*



*take it!*' she repeated, her voice rising, her eyes wide and dazed. It was obvious she was wound up to the extreme limit of her endurance, and there was the likelihood of a very painful scene. Hastily Mr. Turner asked the jury whether they had heard sufficient, and there was a unanimous murmur of acquiescence. Mrs. Arbuthnot was directed to leave the box, and the foreman of the jury said they would like to express their sympathy with her. The coroner agreed, but suggested it would be better to wait until the end of the proceedings. He had still to call the medical man who made the autopsy.

"Dr. Maudsley proved a difficult and tiresome witness. He used technical words that puzzled the jury, and gave details that seemed unnecessarily nauseating. He said that only the abdominal viscera had been examined as yet, and they were in a perfectly normal state; the stomach had been taken out, and at the larger end there were numerous small, yellowish-white spots about the size of a mustard seed. In reply to a question he said these were not at all accountable for death, nor would they have any effect on the health of anyone. He was diffuse and slow, the hour was already late, and when it became obvious that what was wanted could not be got from him at this juncture, the coroner adjourned the inquiry for a fortnight for the completion of the medical evidence.

"The witnesses and the jury were then bound over in the usual way to appear at the adjourned inquiry."

The following day the coroner received a letter. Keightley Wilbur was sitting with him when it arrived. The coroner read the letter slowly, and then re-read it. After which he passed it to his visitor, saying, "What do you make of that?"

This was the remarkable document handed to Keightley for an opinion:

*"Personal — without prejudice.*

*"381 UPPER BROOK STREET, W.*

"DEAR SIR,— You held an inquest yesterday on little Leonard Hobbs. The jury and yourself were sympathetic with the bereaved mother, Mrs. Arbuthnot.

"It may interest you to know that an inquest was held on Mrs. Arbuthnot's uncle, with whom she lived as a girl, and a year or two later on her aunt, who both died under circumstances necessitating investigation — Mr. and Mrs. Latimer Rowlands, of Adderley, Sussex. In the opinion of the nurses and many other people there should have been a similar inquiry into the death of her first husband, James Hobbs, a fine young man of eight-and-twenty, who quarrelled with Mr. Gerald Arbuthnot and turned him out of his house a few days before being taken

ill. You adjourned the inquest yesterday for further medical evidence, and the witnesses were bound over. I think the above facts should be before you when you reassemble. And one or two others which you can easily verify.

"Mrs. Arbuthnot is heavily in debt, having lost money playing baccarat at Boulogne and Le Touquet. She plays bridge daily at high points, dines at expensive restaurants, and dresses from Paris. By the death of her son she comes in for a few thousand pounds of ready money at a time when the need for it is acute.

"You were not satisfied with the medical evidence. But the medical evidence is the least part of this strange case of successive inquests upon Mrs. Arbuthnot's relatives.—Yours sincerely,

"JULIA VIBART."

Keightley was strangely interested, not the least so because Julia Vibart was a friend — or at least an acquaintance — of his mother.

"Well, what do you think of that?" Mr. Turner asked him, puffing away at his pipe.

"Do you often have such letters about your cases?" Keightley asked.

"Oh, yes! But only when there is something mysterious about them, something unusual, or that attracts the public attention. And such letters are generally anonymous."

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"You do not look upon this as a mysterious or unusual case?"

"No; sad, but not in any way mysterious. You were in court? I know your hobby, and that you think there is a story concealed behind every coroner's verdict. But you must not carry it too far." He spoke sententiously; he was rather a sententious person. "Pretty little woman, wasn't she? I thought there was something very pathetic and pleasing about her. Not the sort of woman you would have thought would have such a bitter and malicious enemy."

"You think the letter malicious?"

"Don't you?"

"Not entirely. What are you going to do about it?"

"To do about it!" And the coroner took a surprised puff at his pipe. "Nothing. Put it on the fire, of course."

"I should not let your admiration of Mrs. Arbuthnot's good looks persuade you to that course," Keightley said coolly. "I should think it over again. Mrs. Vibart is not the woman to be ignored. She won't leave the matter here."

Mr. Turner looked annoyed, and Keightley Wilbur stood up and threw his cigarette into the fireplace. "No, I should certainly not let Mrs. Arbuthnot's attractions carry you as far as that," he repeated thoughtfully.

"Nonsense," the coroner answered pettishly. "I don't know what you mean. When a man has a hobby like yours there is no saying where it will lead him."

"All right. Just as you like. But if you are really not going to do anything in the matter, would you mind if I keep the letter? I might make a few inquiries on my own account. The thing interests me, I admit. Is there any way, for instance, of finding out if the contents of this letter are true?"

"I could send my officer to make inquiries," Mr. Turner admitted reluctantly.

It was true that he had found Mrs. Arbuthnot attractive and pathetically pretty, that she had appeared to plead to him for help from her place on the witness-stand, and that he had found quite a little glow of pleasure in answering her appeal. He was one of those bachelors, less rare than most people suppose, whose amorousness preserves them from matrimony by the large indefiniteness of its quality. He had a roving and appreciative eye, and a lame and halting imagination. Mr. Turner was past middle age, inclined to be stout, and conscientious in the performance of his duty notwithstanding his idiosyncrasies.

"If you have really taken a fancy to the little woman . . ."

Such an innuendo was not to be borne, and Keightley had ultimately little trouble in persuad-

ing his host that Mrs. Vibart's letter must neither be thrown on the fire nor ignored. Keightley considered the statements should be verified, and if they were found to be correct that action should be taken upon them. It was Mr. Turner's business to know what action, and not Keightley's. Keightley was prepared to advise or assist, but naturally it must be ex-officially.

Somehow or other, nevertheless, instructions were given to the coroner's officer. The statements contained in Mrs. Vibart's letter were investigated, and all of them were confirmed! There *had* been inquests both upon Mrs. Arbuthnot's aunt and uncle, and in each case the findings had been inconclusive. Under these circumstances, and constant pressure, Mr. Turner ultimately and reluctantly sent Mrs. Vibart's letter and the result of his officer's investigation to the Public Prosecutor. The Public Prosecutor, whose curiosity had already been titillated by a private talk with Mr. Keightley Wilbur, wrote back word that he would be represented at the adjourned inquest. This was not a fortnight later, but a month, Dr. Maudsley having asked for an extension of time in order to conclude his post-mortem.

That month had made a considerable difference in Mrs. Arbuthnot's appearance. She had dropped something of her pathos and all of her tendency to hysteria. Her mourning was modified and elegant;

and when she caught the coroner's eye, which she seemed to do unconsciously, but quite often, he felt like a worm and a traitor, and wished that he had never listened to Keightley.

Mr. Humphrey Marden, representing the Director of Public Prosecutions, concentrated his attention upon Mrs. Arbuthnot for some time, although without her becoming aware of it. She wore a little spot of black sticking-plaster, as if to heighten the effect of her pallor, and probably for the same purpose her eye-lashes were artificially darkened. She appeared sad, but not unduly so. Once, in reply to some observation of her husband, she even smiled, although as if under protest, displaying pretty teeth. When she took off her gloves in readiness to be sworn, Keightley noticed and pointed out to Mr. Marden that her hands did not match the delicacy of her figure; they were large, and the knuckles prominent, the flesh grown over the flat nails, which were pinkly varnished. Both men agreed that they were cruel hands. She wore no wedding-ring, although she had been twice married. There was a man's ring on her little finger — one diamond set in thick gold.

Humphrey Marden, a thin and wiry man, with a broad, intellectual forehead and a close, combative mouth, was instinctively suspicious and professionally acute. Mrs. Vibart's letter had interested him considerably; he agreed that it was malevolent, and

now they speculated as to what story lay behind it.

That there was a story both men knew the moment Mrs. Vibart came into the court. Mrs. Arbuthnot's pallor turned to a sickly yellow, and she trembled all over like a little dog on the edge of a pond.

After the conclusion of Dr. Maudsley's evidence, when, in the natural order of events, the verdict of "Death from misadventure" would have been recorded, and the rider of the jury's sympathy put into correct form, there was a slight pause. Then the coroner said, almost apologetically:

"Gentlemen,— After the last adjournment of this case I received a letter the contents of which I felt it my duty to communicate to the Director of Public Prosecutions. His representative is here to-day, and wishes me to call the writer."

Mrs. Arbuthnot's face became a study of pallid hatred or fear. Such a change came upon it that even the coroner was startled. Husband and wife whispered hurriedly together, and Gerald Arbuthnot got up and began to speak. Mrs. Vibart was already on the witness-stand and being sworn by the constable.

"I protest against this woman being called." The solitary Press man sat up and began to take notice, and the jury leaned forward. "She can know nothing whatever about the accident. She has always hated Ethel, my wife. . . ." He spoke with almost incoherent anger, and a certain dazed



stupidity, as if he had been prompted what to say and had forgotten the words in which to express himself.

Mr. Marden rose, also, and asked smoothly if Mrs. Arbuthnot was represented by a solicitor. He said Mr. Arbuthnot's intervention was irregular. The witness had written a letter, and it was by his instructions she was called to give evidence upon it.

"We were told to-day's proceedings would be purely formal," Mr. Arbuthnot answered, and he appealed to the coroner.

The coroner, still uncertain as to his own action in the matter, hesitatingly suggested that, after Mrs. Vibart's letter had been put to her, they should adjourn for the attendance of Mrs. Arbuthnot's solicitor. He said, looking to the representative of the Public Prosecutor for confirmation, that it might be necessary to recall the witness to give evidence on a future occasion, and that cross-examination should be reserved.

Mr. Marden replied he thought that was a very reasonable course to take.

Mrs. Vibart was a tall and graceful woman, exquisitely dressed, and evidently of a higher social position than the Arbuthnots. She had been quite unmoved by Mr. Arbuthnot's interruption, and gave her evidence without any exhibition of feeling:

"I am Julia Vibart, wife of Archibald Vansittart Vibart, of Tregarthen Towers, Cornwall, and 381

Upper Brook Street. I wrote the letter to the coroner, produced, and am prepared to be examined upon it. I know nothing of the death of Leonard Hobbs, but am well acquainted with his mother and her history. Mrs. Arbuthnot's first husband was my half-brother. Mr. Arbuthnot was in the house at the time of his death, although my brother had ordered him out of it a few days before he was taken ill. I did, and do, think there were suspicious circumstances about my brother's death. I did not communicate with the coroner on that occasion. I thought the murder was constructive, and might be difficult to prove. Nothing could bring him back to me," she added sadly.

At the word "murder" a little thrill ran through the half-empty court, and the Press man was seen to be writing rapidly. Mr. Arbuthnot had again risen to his feet, but was bidden to sit down by the coroner.

In reply to Mr. Marden, Mrs. Vibart continued:

"When I read the report of the inquest on my brother's son, the fourth of her relatives who had died whilst under her care, I thought, in the public interest, I could no longer remain silent. I am not actuated by any feeling of malice towards Mrs. Arbuthnot. Yes, I quite realise the implication of my letter."

Mr. Marden asked a few further questions, but there was nothing in the nature of cross-exami-

nation, and the proceedings terminated, after the formal binding over, by an adjournment for one week. Mr. Arbuthnot asked if he could have the letter, and the coroner replied that it had passed out of his possession into that of Mr. Marden. He said he had no doubt whatever that Mr. Arbuthnot, or his solicitor, would be supplied with a copy on application. It was, however, a privileged communication.

At the next hearing the court was crowded and the Press table full. The letter had been published in full, and an enterprising journal actually reproduced it in facsimile, although it was said never to have been out of Mr. Marden's possession. Several applications had been made to Judges in Chambers on this and other points. Everyone, however remotely connected with the case, was snapshotted as they entered or left the court. All the intervening week the papers had come out with large headlines and the promise of startling disclosures. "The Arbuthnot Mystery" had seized the public imagination. Mrs. Vibart was a lady well known in Society, and had entertained royalty. The implication of her letter was obvious, and, indeed, she had not denied it. Since the Maybrick case nothing like this had ever been known. Men and women talked of it in the streets, in omnibuses, and in tubes. Public sympathy wavered and varied. Was this Mrs. Arbuthnot a modern Borgia, or the most unfortunate of women? Was she entangled in a series of al-

most unheard-of coincidences, or a secret and callous murderess?

At the adjourned inquest Mrs. Vibart was the first witness called. Mrs. Arbuthnot's solicitor was in court, and proved most unfortunate in his examination of her. He elicited, without intending to do so, a story of an unhappy marriage and much that was damaging, if not damning, to his client. Mrs. Vibart managed to barb with venom each apparently innocent answer.

"No, I never met Mrs. Arbuthnot until she had been married some time to my half-brother. She was not in my social circle; her father was a publican, or hotel proprietor — what is called, I believe, a 'licensed victualler.' Yes, my brother was attached to her, although of late he had been jealous and suspicious of her intimacy with Mr. Arbuthnot, her present husband, who lived with them for a short time as a paying guest. Shortly before his mysterious death my brother made a will, dividing his property between his wife and son. I heard that there had been several violent scenes between my brother and Mr. Arbuthnot. Finally Jim, my brother, turned him out of the house, and forbade him to re-enter it. He was taken ill the day after he had delivered his ultimatum. Mr. Arbuthnot is a man of limited means and no occupation. He was supposed to pay a small sum, but practically he lived

on my brother. Jim told me so himself. My information as to my brother's last illness came from the nurses. They were both very scandalised by Gerald Arbuthnot's constant presence in the house, and all that went on."

Mr. Waterlow objected sharply to the word "mysterious," and, addressing the jury, said there was nothing mysterious about Jim Hobbs's death, except in the evil imagination of the witness. Mr. Hobbs died of typhoid fever. Mrs. Vibart calmly replied that her brother did not die of typhoid fever, but of a concurrent pneumonia. Before anyone could stop her she added:

"The window of his room was thrown wide open when he was in the sweating stage of high fever. *Neither of the nurses had opened it.*"

Mr. Marden, on behalf of the Public Prosecutor, watched the evidence closely. There were constant interruptions. The court was in a condition of barely suppressed excitement. Jurymen asked irrelevant questions. Formal or informal objections were made continually — notably by the coroner himself, who stated more than once that they were inquiring into the death of Leonard Hobbs, and said he would have no extraneous matter introduced. He avoided Mrs. Arbuthnot's eye when he added weakly that if she had been unfaithful to her first husband, this was neither the place nor time to in-

.

investigate her conduct. He endeavoured to limit the inquiry; but apparently the case was too strong, and broke from his control.

At the instance of Mr. Marden, for instance, evidence of Mrs. Arbuthnot's financial position was called for and produced. It was overwhelming and incontrovertible. She was blacklisted in two of the great trade protection papers, there were judgment and other summonses against her, and she had been frequently sued. It appeared also that not only was Leonard Hobbs's life insured for a considerable sum, but Mrs. Arbuthnot had been endeavouring to raise money on the policy. She had been in communication with the office a week or two before the boy came home to undergo his trifling operation. She had not succeeded in raising the money. The office had asked for two substantial sureties, and they had not been forthcoming.

This evidence produced a very painful impression.

Mr. Waterlow protested vehemently and often. He was sufficiently injudicious to jump up, whilst the gentleman from the insurance office was actually on the stand, and passionately ask the court to consider to what all this evidence was tending, of what were they suspecting and accusing his young and wretched client? Of murdering her only child for the sake of a few hundred pounds

that he, or any of her friends, would have been glad to advance her?

He succeeded in attracting the attention of the reporters and voicing what the people in court had hardly brought themselves to think. Before any charge at all had been made, Mr. Waterlow said indignantly that a more cruel, more baseless accusation had never been promulgated. In his speech, before the verdict was given, Mrs. Arbuthnot's lawyer said that he could trace the malignity with which his client had been treated, and the Press campaign against her, to the woman who had written her letter and gone into the witness-box to vilify her sister-in-law's moral character, to blacken her name. He said if the matter did not end here he would be able to prove that this was not the first occasion on which Mrs. Vibart had striven to injure an innocent woman whose only real fault was that she had married Mrs. Vibart's brother.

When he had concluded this tirade, Mr. Marden rose and said that Mr. Waterlow would have ample opportunity in another place to defend his client. He spoke very gravely, and everybody understood the significance of his speech.

The coroner asked if Mr. Marden had any further witnesses, and when the reply was in the negative summarised the case shortly and called upon the jury for their verdict. They retired, and were

gone for over two hours. Apparently they were unable to make up their minds, for twice a note was brought in to the coroner asking for directions. They wanted to see the report of the inquests of Mrs. Arbuthnot's aunt and uncle. They asked what had become of the bottle of carbolic and the bottle of bromide for which it had been mistaken. The coroner told them that when Mrs. Arbuthnot had, in her frenzy after the boy's death, attempted to drink the remainder of the carbolic solution, the bottle had been broken, and unfortunately the pieces had been thrown away.

Finally they came back with a verdict that the coroner refused to accept.

"We find that Leonard Hobbs met his death from carbolic acid poisoning, administered by his mother, but under what circumstances there is not sufficient evidence to show."

He sent them back again, explaining that this was no verdict at all.

"What you have to decide, gentlemen, is, whether this was 'Death from misadventure,' or whether you have heard sufficient to make out a prima facie case for a verdict of murder or manslaughter. I may point out to you that, after the observation that has fallen from Mr. Humphrey Marden, it is obvious a further inquiry must take place."

In the end they came to the conclusion that



Leonard Hobbs had met his death from poison, feloniously administered. And on this, after the necessary formalities had been gone through, Mrs. Gerald Arbuthnot was committed for trial on the coroner's warrant.

The next scene in the drama was in extraordinary contrast. Instead of the sordid courthouse, the jury of petty tradesmen, the policemen, and the adjacent mortuary, there was the large and beautiful house in Carlton House Terrace, priceless tapestries on the staircase wall, and the thronging guests, in their fine laces and jewellery, pressing up to where stood their hostess, Keightley Wilbur's mother, at the head of the stairs, the famous pearls round her neck.

The throng was great and the ladies leisurely in their movements. A quiet, undistinguished gentleman, grey and middle-aged, found himself wedged between two who talked with as much freedom as if they had been in the seclusion of their no doubt elegant dressing-rooms.

"That's Julia Vibart there — just in front of Lady Sylvester, in black velvet. Did ever a woman get her own back so neatly? They'll hang that Arbuthnot woman."

"I suppose she is guilty?"

"Not a bit of it, my dear! Charlie used to know her when she was Mrs. Jim Hobbs. He says she's

## 56. THE STORY BEHIND THE VERDICT

the last woman in the world to make a holocaust of her relations; she hasn't the pluck."

"How far do you think things went between her and Archie Vibart?"

"He paid a few bills for her . . ."

Another voice struck in upon the talk:

"Archie Vibart is the sickest man in London to-day. He says if anything happens to Mrs. Jim he'll blow his brains out. He knows if it had not been for him that letter to the coroner would never have been written."

The middle-aged man with the grey whiskers, who was wedged in, could not help listening.

"Brains! Archie Vibart's brains! If he had had half an ounce of intelligence he would have carried on with anyone in the world rather than Mrs. Jim, as you call her — Mrs. Gerald she is now. Julia is a vindictive woman, and he might have known what to expect."

The congestion of traffic broke up at the moment, but the man who listened found himself little better circumstanced. It was Mrs. Vibart herself who was now talking of the Arbuthnot case to her absorbed host, quite calmly, and as if her interest in it was no different from that of the general public.

"Poor Jim!" she was saying. "She led him a dreadful life; he used to come to me with his troubles. After she fell in love with Gerald Arbuthnot she refused to live with him, although she remained

in the same house. Jim was quite infatuated with her, or he would have taken my advice earlier."

"That was ——"

"To insist on the friendship with Gerald Arbuthnot being broken off. Instead, he actually had him to stay in the house! He said he wanted to show his confidence in her. Jim was never very wise."

Keightley had been pursuing Mrs. Vibart ever since her appearance in the witness-box. Nothing but the Arbuthnot case interested him, and he spent his entire time in re-constructing the psychology of what he was already convinced was a most rare and unique crime. Mrs. Vibart was nothing loth in supplying him with detail, and he asked her question after question, as if he had been a child, repeating himself and making her repeat herself.

"She had small vices. Tell me again about the dressmaker."

"She used to have things home from the shops on appro. and copy them."

"Splendid! And about her meals?"

"She would lunch or dine with any man who asked her; if they did not ask her, she asked them. She had no idea of domesticity. All she knew was a restaurant or club life. She would walk up and down Bond Street until she met someone she knew. . . ."

"This was before she met Gerald Arbuthnot?"

"Not at all; it was both before and after. Her

first intrigue after her marriage was with his brother. The Arbuthnots were college friends of poor Jim's. I saw what was going on and warned him."

"And then?" he asked.

"Then all at once my brother seemed to realise the truth of what I told him, and turned Gerald out of his house, forbade him to come back under any pretext. Poor Jim! He was taken ill a few hours after that. I was abroad at the time. A friend telegraphed to me, and I hurried back; but, of course, I arrived too late."

"You really do think that she made away with him?"

"I really do know that she had all to gain and nothing to lose by his death. She had run through his money, or the greater part of it. And the nurses were very suspicious of her."

"You questioned them?"

"Oh, yes! I felt I ought to know. They told me he had food the doctors forbade, and of the open window. Gerald Arbuthnot sat with her in the library all the time Jim was upstairs dying and they canoodled together on the sofa in front of the fire."

"Who was it said ambition was the last infirmity of noble minds? I suppose what you are really aiming at is to have a relative in Madame Tus-saud's?"

A sense of humour was not Julia Vibart's strong point.

"I did not wish to appear against her at all. I only wrote to the coroner because I thought it a public duty."

David Devenish joined them — a clean-shaven, thin and alert man, with his hair turning grey, well known through his connection with one of the big halfpenny papers and his intimacy with a certain popular actress.

"Report credits you with a different motive," he said lightly.

"Report wrongs me." She turned to him hotly. "You ought to contradict it."

"Your husband takes her part, doesn't he? He says Ethel Arbuthnot was devoted to the boy."

"She is very subtle and very clever, not in the least as she appears on the surface. Archie really knows very little about her. I ask you, or any unprejudiced person, how would you relish the ministrations of your wife when you were dangerously ill if her lover were downstairs, waiting to hear the bulletins?"

"*Was* Gerald Arbuthnot her lover? I understand they did not marry for over two years after your brother's death."

"Why should they hurry to go through the ceremony?" she answered scornfully.

A turn in the tide of people swept her upstairs,

but kept the two men who had been talking to her where they were. David Devenish recognised the undistinguished-looking listener.

"Good-evening, Sir Charles. Did you hear 'the witness for the prosecution'? Good heavens! Of what malice these women are capable. It is unthinkable they should ever be allowed to take part in national affairs."

"You think Mrs. Vibart malicious?" Sir Charles Milton asked.

"And you?"

The Recorder smiled quietly.

"I have little doubt Mrs. Arbuthnot's case will be heard without prejudice," he answered.

Keightley wished to argue and discuss the matter. Sir Charles gave him the attention one's host demands, but no more. It was obvious, or so Keightley said afterwards, that already he had taken a view of the "Arbuthnot case."

At the assizes, when the Recorder addressed the Grand Jury, he gave a weighty and judicial résumé of the case of "The Crown *v.* Ethel Arbuthnot." He said the inquiry before the coroner had been very irregularly conducted, and a large mass of extraneous matter introduced into the case, with the object, apparently, of creating prejudice and inflaming public opinion. The jury would either find a true bill or not, as they thought right. He said he

did not wish to influence their judgment, only to point out to them that, as regarded the inquests on Mrs. Arbuthnot's aunt and uncle, further investigation had revealed the fact that the man was an habitual drunkard. He had a fall or blow, of which he was only able to give a very incoherent account before his death. The jury found he died from an accident, the cause of which there was not sufficient evidence to show. There was nothing at all to connect his young niece with the event. As regarded the woman, they had a verdict to the effect that she died from an overdose of veronal, whether self-administered or feloniously there was again no evidence. There was no accusation of any kind made then, or, until now, by inference or otherwise, against Mrs. Arbuthnot, who was a mere schoolgirl at the time. The Recorder added that he did not know how such a charge could have been sustained.

"He says he does not want to influence their judgment," Keightley commented scoffingly to David Devenish, who was seated beside him in the court. "I wonder what more he could have said had that been his only objective?"

"Hush!" answered the journalist. "Wait, give the man a chance."

"Now," said the Recorder, "we come to the death of the prisoner's first husband, James Hobbs. The person who wrote to the coroner is James Hobbs's step-sister. If you decide upon sending the

case for trial, it must be on the strength of this document, of which the prejudice is easily apparent."

He spoke weightily, every word told; and although David Devenish was impatient of Keightley Wilbur's running comments, he could not but agree that the whole speech might have been made by a counsel for the defence; it was an indictment of public curiosity and Press comment, a personal, and to Keightley at least, a biased view.

"Gentlemen: James Hobbs died of typhoid fever and pneumonia. Several doctors saw him in the course of his illness, and the practitioner in attendance filled in the death certificate. You must clear your minds of anything you have heard or read about this case and consider it entirely on its merits. Mrs. Arbuthnot is not charged upon any count except the manslaughter of her son; nor is she chargeable upon any other. That she is in debt, and has endeavoured to raise money upon an insurance policy on her son's life, is not an indictable offence. You have to consider the circumstances of the child's death. There is no evidence to show that Mrs. Arbuthnot suggested the operation; the evidence is all the other way. The boy was sent home from school on the advice of the school doctor, and his mother took him to one of the most eminent physicians in London to confirm the prognosis and advise as to treatment. Gentlemen, is it conceivable that at this moment she began to plan to use the



occasion in order to make away with him? Or is it the suggestion of the prosecution that the crime — if it were a crime — was unpremeditated, and that it was not until, in the dead of night, when the boy woke and, so to speak, cried to her for help — her own and only child — she conceived all at once the devilish, I use the word with due deliberation, the devilish scheme of freeing herself from her pecuniary embarrassments by encompassing his agonising death. The coroner's jury found that the prisoner had done this dreadful, this almost incredible deed. If there is any doubt in your minds, you will find a true bill, and the case will be tried by a competent tribunal. But if, on the other hand, and after mature deliberation, you are unable to bring yourselves to this conclusion, you will throw out the bill."

Keightley's ironical cheer drew upon him the attention of the Recorder who, after a startled moment of indignant recognition, said if there was any further disturbance he should order the court to be cleared.

The jury threw out the bill, and Mrs. Arbuthnot, who had already been in custody for five weeks, was ordered to be immediately released.

Twenty-four hours later there were big placards at all the street corners, and London was startled by the announcement:

"SUICIDE OF ETHEL ARBUTHNOT.

"SENSATIONAL SEQUEL TO THE ARBUTHNOT  
CASE."

Keightley brought the evening edition of the *Grail* into his mother's sitting-room when he went home for afternoon tea. He seemed very triumphant and full of self-importance.

"Here is the story behind the verdict with a vengeance, mater. You've read it?"

"No; and I don't want to. It is horrible of you to look so pleased. It is a dreadful thing that the poor woman should have been driven to such despair."

"But if she were guilty?" he put in quickly.

"How can she have been guilty? The grand jury could not even find a true bill."

"The Recorder led them. He got his back up against Julia Vibart the night he met her here. Devenish as good as told me so. If it had not been for me ——"

"My dear, I wish you would drop this craze. You are growing quite bloodthirsty and inhuman."

"I wish you would sometimes let me finish a sentence." He was almost pettish. "If it had not been for me, I tell you, Ethel Arbuthnot might still be alive."

"Horrible! I only hope it isn't true."

She wanted to talk about the last rubber of bridge

and a curious combination of cards, about her next dinner-party, her new tea-gown — anything but police-court problems.

"I believe you are going to insist upon reading it to me."

"Of course." He settled her in a corner of the sofa, flung himself on the floor and rested his back against her knees. "Now I'm comfortable. Yes, I really believe I am responsible for this confession. I am not going to read her letter until I have told you all about it. I met her at the prison gate — I and Gerald Arbuthnot. He was all to pieces, and no help to anyone. I took them to a private room at Verrey's, and gave them a really good dinner, a magnum of Mumm after cocktails, port to follow, and liqueurs. It took a long time to get her going. Arbuthnot sat with a silly, painted grin on his face, lapping up the drink, and she hardly spoke at all.

"I tried her one way after another; talked first of the coroner, and then of the Recorder. Poor old Johnnie Turner — he should have heard me! I sympathised with her; said how badly she had been treated. She sat all hunched up, crumbling her bread, hardly eating at all. Then, all at once, quite abruptly, apropos of nothing at all, I brought in Julia Vibart's name.

"'There is one person, anyway, in London to-night who will be glad of your acquittal,' I said.

"'Who is that?' she answered dully.

" ' Julia Vibart.' Mater, you never saw such a change; she yellowed all over; there was vitriol in her eyes and pouring from her tongue. I can't repeat you the things she said. She is a gutter-snipe, of course; but less than that, ever so much less, and more! When she got her breath she asked me why Julia would be glad, and I told her that Archie had said to everyone that if anything happened to her he would never go back to Brook Street; he would leave England ——"

" ' He would leave her?' she asked quickly, all at once, all in a breath. ' Archie would have left Julia for me, on my account?'

" She was dangerous, mater, vicious, the worst type of human rodent. She spat contempt upon the Vibarts, their social position; accused Julia of crimes of which I am sure she had never even heard — unnatural, degrading crimes. Then she spoke of Archie. I believe she had tried to lure him away from his wife, deliberately and of *malice prepense*. She gloated, she positively gloated over the suggestion that he would have left Julia if she had been found guilty. I got tired of it in the end — the repetition and the virulence — and got up to go."

" You left them there? "

" You know how late I was in coming home? "

" I heard you."

" I slept until one o'clock. Then I went down to the Savoy grill, where I met Devenish. I knew

about the suicide before I met him. The news was on all the placards. But not the letter. That is only just out. You must let me read it to you. I know you hate it. A human document is less precious to you than four aces or a quintette in hearts. But I'm made differently. It won't take three minutes — her letter, I mean. We can skip David's journalese. No, I won't; I'll begin at the beginning. I made Turner communicate with the Public Prosecutor. And when that damned Recorder, with his unimaginative speech, misled the Grand Jury, it was I who worked her up to this confession. The letter must have been written within an hour after I left them. Listen. David starts:

*" 'By taking her own life in the sensational manner described in another column, Mrs. Ethel Arbuthnot has added an absorbing chapter to the annals of criminal psychology. We make no apology for giving in extenso the letter she left behind her.'*

"The letter is to me. The police found it in the flat; they wanted to keep it, but I got it from them, and let David have it in time for the fifth edition. My name isn't mentioned; I thought it better not. I suppose it will come out ultimately, but that can't be helped. David prints the letter without beginning or end. The police have it again now, but you shall see it when I get it back.

*" 'Thank you for all your kindness to me to-*

night; but it is all of no use. The brokers have been in the flat, and everything seems to smell of them. I'm very little better off here than I was in Pentonville; and although the Grand Jury threw out the bill against me, there will always be people who will think I was guilty. It is all Julia Vibart's fault. But for her disgraceful letter there would have been a vote of sympathy for me at the coroner's inquest, and no one would ever have thought anything more of the matter. You asked me about Lennie. I did give him the carbolic by mistake, whatever anyone may say; I never dreamt of it burning his throat and mouth. Gerald had given me a brandy and soda, and I did not know what I was doing. The tradesmen and moneylenders have got Lennie's insurance money; I have not benefited a penny by it. I have had a most unhappy life, and through Julia Vibart everything has been brought up against me now. Uncle was always teasing me when I was a child; making me do and say things I hated. He made me stand up and beg for my Sunday dinner once, as if I had been a dog. If I ran under his feet when he was drunk, and he fell to the bottom of the stairs, I can't see that I was to blame because his skull was fractured. And as for aunt, she watched me, and kept me in her stuffy rooms, and never let me do anything I wanted. She asked if she had had her sleeping draught, and I said "No." I did that twice in the night, out of kindness. She

wanted to sleep soundly. I know you will understand.

“ ‘ It is disgraceful to say I did anything to Jim; nobody but Julia would have thought of such a thing. If I opened the window, it was because he seemed so hot; and as for giving him things to eat, he was always fond of sweet things, and the doctors said nothing about plum cake. The nurses were sneaking things; always watching and peering about. I was not going to ask them what I might give my own husband.

“ ‘ There was never anything between Gerald and me whilst Jim was alive, whatever people said. Gerald was a great comfort to me all the time Jim was ill. That is what Julia resented — that I should have any comfort. She was always jealous of me, first with Jim and then with Archie. The truth is, that I have sex attraction and she hasn't. I want everyone to know how cruelly she has persecuted me. I am going to take an injection of morphia, and then impale myself on her railings, or lie down on her doorstep — that's where I shall be found; and she will see what Archie will do then. The house won't have half a bad name . . . ’ ”

Keightley interrupted his reading:

“ David takes it for granted that she meant to commit suicide. But, of course, she had no such intention; she was never untrue to type. She meant to take just not enough, and to make a row

with the policeman who rescued her. However, something must have gone wrong with her calculations. David goes on:

*“ ‘As we know, she carried out her intention, and was found on the doorstep of Mrs. Vibart’s house in Upper Brook Street at an early hour this morning.’*

“ Now David begins to preach. The paper has to keep up its tone:

*“ ‘The whole document is addressed to one of our great students of humanity. It betrays an attitude of mind so rarely detached, and so amazingly perverse, that had it appeared as fiction it might well have been deemed incredible. Four murders have been charged against the writer, one more heinous than the other — the relatives who sheltered her childhood, the husband who garnered her youth, her own and only child. And practically she admits and excuses them all! “I have had a most unhappy life,” she exclaims, and instances the smallest of childish grievances. She blames her sister-in-law for having brought her to her present pass, and in her last hours is only occupied in planning revenge. She is neither repentant nor ashamed, only vindictive.*

*“ ‘Further investigations we have ourselves been able to make shed a little more lurid light on this amazing personality.’*

“ It is I who made the investigations, and not



David at all; but that is by the way," was Keightley's *sotto voce*.

"*As a child Ethel Arbuthnot seems to have been a curious, secretive, savage little creature, resenting control, devoid of gratitude, acutely sensitive to ridicule. She was barely fifteen when she accomplished her uncle's death in the manner she describes. A little later she discovers herself to be possessed of what is known as "sex attraction," and all her aunt's vigilance is needed to keep her from disaster. How that vigilance was rewarded we also know. James Hobbs, who met her whilst she was still in mourning, married her at a registrar's office within a few weeks of the acquaintance. She was faithful to him apparently but for a very short period. Mr. Gerald Arbuthnot, who had been best man at the wedding, was godfather to her child; and shortly afterwards we find him living in the same house with them, from which time onwards the domestic atmosphere was in a condition of continual turmoil. That Gerald Arbuthnot would have been betrayed in his turn appears probable from the frequent visits of Mr. Archibald Vibart to the flat in Sloane Street, and his admission that he had supplied Mrs. Arbuthnot with money. We make no apology for mentioning the names of these two gentlemen; it is unavoidable under the circumstances. One of our representatives interviewed Mr. Arbuthnot, and*

*asked him if it were true that his wife gambled at Le Touquet, Boulogne, Dinard, and in a notorious London bridge club; that her financial troubles were due to losses in all these places. He replied, as if it excused her conduct, that she went to church regularly, and frequently to sacred or classical concerts on Sunday afternoons!*

*" 'Mr. Archibald Vibart has left London, but our interviewer succeeded in seeing him before he left. He admitted everything, but seemed to be still persuaded that Mrs. Arbuthnot was a greatly wronged woman.'*

*"Now, mater, this last is all mine. When you get it well into your beautiful little head you will understand what it is that lures me into the purlieus of criminal investigation:*

*" 'The case is interesting in many ways, but chiefly perhaps in so far as it shows the incapacity of our legal machinery to deal with the abstruse, the unknown, the unexpected. Sir Charles Milton led the Grand Jury to their decision to throw out the bill against Mrs. Arbuthnot by telling them there was no evidence against the prisoner. It seems to the lay mind, in view of her confession, that, if this is so, the laws of evidence require remodelling, and considerably greater significance given to the word "circumstantial." We wonder what Sir Charles Milton thinks now of his speech to the jury. It was greeted with ironical cheers, to which his only*

*response was a threat to clear the court. We know now which end of the court should have been relieved.'"*

"There, mater, what do you think of that?"

"I think it is time I went to dress for dinner."

"Cynic!" But he rose and opened the door for her.

"You won't admit that I have been the *deus ex machina* that sent one criminal to her doom?"

"When are you going to take up literature again?"

"When I am through with life," he answered airily.

## CHAPTER III

### THE CASE OF MORNINGTON RANSBY

"SUICIDE of a London barrister." "A London barrister shoots himself on Wimbledon Common." So ran the posters, but there was not sufficient interest taken in the case to fill the coroner's court at Wimbledon when the inquiry was opened.

The jury, having been sworn, filed into the mortuary to see the body. The walls were white-washed, and the floor of stone. The body of Mornington Ransby lay uncoffined, and these twelve men, eleven of them perfunctorily, and one with seeing eyes, gazed at him as he lay. This one was an artist, absurdly out of place with his fellow-jurymen, surprised at finding himself in such a position, and yet curious of the adventure.

Roger Macphail saw in the cold clay, and mentally translated to sculptured marble, the torso of an athlete and a head low-browed and Greek, hair close-cropped and black, with a kink in it, a resolute chin, delicate ears, lips a little thick, and a square jaw. Involuntarily he exclaimed:

"What an extraordinarily handsome man."

"You're looking at his face, sir. His hands

would tell you more. See if he hasn't got a thick or deformed thumb. Suicides and murderers generally have something unusual with their thumbs."

Roger Macphail looked as he was bidden by one of his fellow-jurymen, and saw that, though the dead hands were finely modelled, the left thumb was short and stumpy, as if unfinished.

"You've noticed that before?" he asked his informant.

"Often and often," was the reply. "You look out for it when you're called again."

Roger Macphail shuddered at the idea that he should ever be called again to serve on a coroner's jury.

They filed back to their places. The coroner, Mr. Flynn, took his seat, and the first witness was sworn. The first witness was the milkman who had found the body and given notice to the police. Mr. Flynn was quick and impatient, and managed to keep all the evidence relevant.

James Welling was not allowed to dilate upon the gruesomeness of the spectacle, nor his feelings when he "came acrost it." What he said to his missus was ruled out, and in lieu of the great access of self-importance, he felt snubbed and slighted when he was told to stand down.

Next came the police evidence, and then that of the relatives.

Dr. Robert Hunt was the first witness from

whom any evidence of importance was to be expected. It was from his house Mornington Ransby had gone forth to his death.

Dr. Hunt gave his evidence nervously and hesitatingly. He had done little more than admit to his own name, address, profession, and relationship to the deceased, before Roger Macphail, practised as he was in reading facial expression, decided the witness was not standing there with the intention of speaking "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," but in order to deliver, parrot fashion, a story in which he had been well coached.

"I am a licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians, and practise in Wimbledon. Mornington Ransby was my wife's brother. He had broken down in nerve, and was staying with us to recruit."

"What do you mean by broken down?"

"He was very depressed."

Examined and cross-examined by the medical coroner, Dr. Hunt gave the text-book symptoms of neurasthenia or nervous breakdown. It appeared that Mornington Ransby had lacked none of these, was depressed in spirits and sleepless, ate irregularly, suffered from indigestion, and thought himself incapable of getting through his work.

"What was the nature of his work?" interrupted Mr. Flynn.

"He had a growing practice at the Bar."

"Was he in any pecuniary difficulties?"

"Oh, no; he was a rich man."

"You know of no personal or private troubles?"

The witness here hesitated, and the coroner pressed his question.

"There had been, I believe, some little friction between him and his wife."

A slender, grey-whiskered gentleman here rose and said he represented the widow of the late Mr. Mornington Ransby.

Mr. Flynn asked if Mrs. Ransby were in court.

"Mrs. Ransby is unable to be present; she is prostrate with grief. The differences between her and her husband were due solely to Mr. Ransby's state of health. Mrs. Ransby saw her husband the Tuesday before his death, was concerned at his condition, and came to us with a view to taking steps to safeguard him."

The grey-whiskered lawyer with gold pince-nez was a partner in the firm of the celebrated criminal lawyers, Messrs. Lauser and Lauser. He went on to make a statement, which he himself might have described as *ex parte*, as to Mr. Mornington Ransby's mental condition. He said the whole affair was naturally very painful to the family, and he asked the gentlemen of the Press — of whom, by the way, there was only one present — not to give the matter more publicity than was necessary. He spoke feelingly of Mr. Ransby's gifts, and the

promising career that had been cut short in this untimely way.

Further evidence elicited that when last seen alive Mr. Ransby had told his host that he would be engaged with correspondence, and did not wish to be disturbed.

Mr. Flynn asked pertinently, if Mr. Ransby had been engaged in correspondence, what had become of the letters? Dr. Hunt said that none had been found, and it was conjectured that he made this an excuse in order to secure solitude. Dr. Hunt said, further, that the deceased resented the watch that was kept upon him, and evaded it to such good purpose that he had purchased a six-chambered revolver on the day of the tragedy. Five chambers were still loaded when they found the body with the pistol beside it.

Mr. Flynn told the jury death must have been instantaneous, that the cause being so evident he had not thought it necessary to order a post-mortem examination to be made, and he directed them to their finding.

A verdict of "Suicide whilst of unsound mind" was brought in, and everybody except Roger Macphail seemed completely satisfied.

Roger Macphail, whose wide forehead and brilliant eyes, crumpled face — humorous, with a touch of grotesquerie — was made more remarkable by a black eighteenth-century stock, had the distinction



of being, according to the opinion of cultured London, the only living exponent of the lost art of painting.

From the court he went to the Savoy for lunch, meeting there Keightley Wilbur, with whom he was on terms of intimacy, and who listened to his description of the inquiry at Wimbledon with interest.

"I am sure there was a story behind that verdict, if we had only been allowed to hear it."

"There is always a story behind a coroner's verdict," Keightley answered sententiously.

"That little grey lawyer was there to burke inquiry. I am convinced of it."

Roger went on to tell Keightley what a juryman had said about the thumbs of murderers and suicides, and Wilbur spread out his own hands thoughtfully. They were nervous and slender, without irregularity, and said:

"I should think that theory would not stand the test of examination." Then he began to talk of the extraordinary fatuity of uneducated observation. Roger brought him back with difficulty to the subject in hand.

"I should like to get to know what was the story behind this verdict. What a model Mornington Ransby would have made!"

Roger drew a thumbnail sketch of him on the table-cover as he talked. "Six feet high at least,

and forty inches round the chest." He went on: "He was at the Bar, had a practice — surely many people must have known him. How am I to get to hear something more about him, Wilbur?"

"Ask Devenish. Devenish knows everybody and everything; it is his profession."

Keightley Wilbur then yawned, and said he had only just got up, and wished he had stayed in bed another hour or two, proceeding to state that daylight was "so damned indecorous," and one or two other characteristic things.

"Suicide whilst of unsound mind! I don't believe he was any madder than you or I. He looked quite sane; he had a noble head. I did not want to sit in judgment upon him. They made me, and now I am haunted by the feeling of having done him an injustice — agreed to bear false witness against him."

Keightley said there were so many lawyers, and they were so curiously ineffective, that it was not unnatural if one or two made away with themselves. Probably Mornington Ransby had discovered the incompatibility of law and justice.

Roger was unable to fall in with this persiflage.

"He haunts me, Wilbur. I would have liked to paint him, but as I can't, I want to do him justice. Rich, and apparently successful, extraordinarily handsome, and with thirty or forty good years in

front of him — why should he commit suicide?"

"Because he was mad."

"I tell you he was not mad. No madman could have that brow."

David Devenish joined them.

"You know Macphail, don't you?" Keightley introduced the two men. "We were just talking about you. We want your chastened and considered judgment."

"What is the subject under discussion," David asked, "the menu?"

"The coroner's jury and Mornington Ransby," both men answered simultaneously.

"Did you know him?" Roger asked.

"Mornington Ransby? Very slightly. He did a little work for us on one occasion. By the way, this is the long vacation. I saw the medical witness spoke of overwork. Where did Mornington Ransby find his overwork in the long vacation?"

David Devenish looked at Roger when he asked this question, and Roger had no answer. Keightley, who up to now had feigned a lack of interest, now said carelessly that the same thing had struck him.

"Roger's idea is that the inquiry was burked."

"I know it; I feel it," the artist answered. "I tell you it comes between me and my work that I have assisted at a crime. I have libelled the dead."

"You'll have to help him, Devenish. We cannot have Roger's work interrupted."

David Devenish said a courteous and assenting word.

"I will have some inquiries made."

"It will be awfully good of you."

Keightley was never so deeply engrossed as when he pretended indifference. Now he said:

"Wait. I believe I have a clue — half a clue. I say, Devenish, didn't Mornington Ransby marry one of the Jerman girls?"

"I think that was his wife's maiden name. Why?"

"Of course; I remember all about it now. So that is the man! The plot thickens. I was at his wedding. What a curious coincidence that I should be at his wedding and Roger at his inquest. You will have to go to his funeral, Devenish. Was nothing said about his wife?"

"That she was distressed ——"

"Then she couldn't have been one of the Jerman girls," Keightley answered with decision. "Or else whoever said it lied. The Jerman girls are never distressed."

Before they had time to consider this cryptic utterance the waiter intervened.

"What are you fellows going to have to eat? Bring me a finnan-haddock and some poached eggs."

Roger Macphail was completely indifferent to food, and asked for underdone cold beef, whilst he continued to draw the head of the dead man on the

tablecloth. David was a gourmet, and took some time before he decided upon *sole diablée* and a double cutlet. After which interlude they got back to the topic.

"Didn't Lauser say there were no differences between Ransby and his wife, or only slight ones?" David asked.

"Yes."

"Bring me a slice of smoked salmon — mind you cut it very thin, and some Savoy toast. That must have been a mistake. Mornington Ransby filed his petition a few weeks ago. I remember noticing it because he had been married less than two years."

"Filed his petition!"

"He certainly started divorce proceedings against his wife."

"Sooner or later the Germans are always divorced," Keightley interpolated complacently. "It is the way they were brought up. Old Mother German, when you shake hands with her, presses yours, sighs, and says, 'But I must be faithful to my husband! Before the eldest girl was sixteen, John German used to lock her bedroom door from the outside and take the key whenever there was company in the house.'"

"Keightley never exaggerates — Can't you remember to bring in vinegar with the smoked salmon?" This was to the waiter.

"But seriously now —"

"My dear Roger, you are so infernally serious already that if you only painted a little worse they would make you an Academician."

"He is telling you the story in his own way," David explained. "According to him, Mornington Ransby stumbled into a nest of scorpions when he married a German, and shot himself in the agony of being stung."

"How you do mix your metaphors!" Keightley bewailed, with his mouth full of haddock.

"Not at all. Think it over. The allusion was classical."

"My mistake."

Keightley then continued to talk about the Germans, of whom he told incredible and quite unprintable stories. He said there were four girls, one lovelier than the other, and three sons, all without the moral sense.

"John German spends the bulk of his outrageous income in paying his sons' disgraceful debts and hushing up their worst misdemeanours; in buying off his daughters' lovers and subsidising their complaisant husbands. John has a horror of scandal, was a Jew, and is a churchwarden, hopes and believes that no one knows the first and everybody the second. He is the greatest criminal I have ever met and the most respectable; without a private conscience, but with a most sensitive public one. His creed is that any crime is to be condoned so long as

it cannot be proved. His daughters understand him thoroughly, and profit by their knowledge."

David Devenish asked where these lovely and corrupt Jerman girls were to be met, but Roger Macphail was interested only in hearing about the one who had married Mornington Ransby.

"Ransby married the most beautiful of them all — Esmé. I can't take you to see her because I don't know where she is to be found at the moment. But Leda, the eldest sister, is an intimate friend of mine. I can take you both to see Leda as soon as we have finished lunch."

David Devenish pleaded an engagement.

"Will she talk about Mornington Ransby? Will she tell me why he committed suicide?" Roger asked, looking up from his drawing.

"I shouldn't be surprised. She is not at all a reticent person. It depends how you handle her."

"Let me know if you hear anything sensational," David said lightly, as he went off, leaving the other two together.

"It won't be fit for the chaste columns of the *Daily Grail*," Keightley said when he had gone. "True stories have always to be emasculated for newspaper consumption," he explained. "The naked truth is an indecent thing."

Roger and Keightley sat long over lunch, and then continued smoking and talking in the lounge until it was time to pay an afternoon call. Roger

was full of the inquest, and no other subject held him for long. He put off a sitter by telephone, and said again he could not work until he had satisfied himself about the man on whom he had sat in judgment.

"I'll swear he was not mad," he said in the taxi, for about the fourth time. "The coroner prejudged the case and hurried it through. Lauser was briefed for Mrs. Ransby; no one defended him."

Leda Jerman lived in a little house in Weymouth Street, where the woodwork was black and the paint yellow, the prints Japanese, and the smell of incongruous incense all pervading.

Leda was in the drawing-room alone, but there were several cups on the tea-table that was drawn up to the sofa, as if she expected guests. She wore a wonderful Japanese teagown, and was smoking a Turkish cigarette. She expressed herself delighted to meet Roger Macphail, and thanked Keightley for bringing him; she was obviously well acquainted with his work. Roger found her less beautiful than Keightley had described, but had not been in the room ten minutes before he was ready to admit she was also, and compensatingly, more brilliant. She laid herself out to entertain him.

"You must come and see me when Keightley isn't here," she said presently. "Keightley always insists upon absorbing the conversation. If he fails he becomes epigrammatic, in a soft undercurrent of



sound! I want to talk to you about that wonderful picture you did of mauve orchids and a lead figure. I want to know why Pan was crying instead of piping. Was it because the orchids ought not to have been out of doors? Do tell me. I adored the colour scheme — greys and purples, and the rents of blue in the cloudy sky.”

“Macphail is not here to talk about the eccentricities of genius, nor to expound his artistic creed. He asked me to bring him in order that you should tell him about Mornington Ransby. He was on the jury that found Mornington committed suicide whilst of unsound mind,” Keightley broke in without the slightest ceremony. “He wants you to explain your relative to him.”

“Were you on the jury? How strange! They didn’t say anything unkind about him, did they? I hope not. Poor, dear Mornie!”

“He was your brother-in-law?” Roger asked.

“Was he mad?” inquired Keightley. “That is what we really want to know; and if so, what was it that drove him out of his mind?”

“Mad! Of course not. What an idea! He was very clever and nice ——”

“The story behind the verdict — that is what Roger has come to hear. Tell us the story, Leda.”

Keightley, lounging in a double-cushioned black satin chair, was obviously at home and at ease in this quaint drawing-room.

"Roger has stopped work; he can't think of anything but inquests. He is haunted by the ghost of a man who lay at the mercy of twelve very common jurymen without anyone to defend him. Roger is really a sentimentalist, although he doesn't paint babies and dogs."

Roger disclaimed the title, and Leda commiserated with him for having had to serve on a coroner's jury. They talked a little of procedure, and of how the coroner was judge, jury, advocate, and medical witness all rolled into one. Keightley had evidently read the evidence very carefully for all his affectation of ignorance, and asked presently:

"By the way, what did become of those letters? Of course there were letters?"

Leda answered at once:

"I can show you mine."

"He did not destroy them then?" Roger asked quickly. "He wrote to you?"

"Did George Lauser say they were destroyed? How clever! But how dangerous!"

"A lawyer and a liar are permissible synonyms," Keightley put in.

"Do be quiet. What do you want to know about poor Mornie?" she asked, turning from Keightley to Roger. "Is it really because you think it unjust he should lie under the stigma of lunacy that you are inquiring? It is so sweet of you, but what does it matter? He is quite dead."

"And even buried. Tell us all about it, Leda. I want Roger to go on with his painting."

"Can't you really paint?" she asked feelingly. But when Leda Jerman spoke with feeling there always seemed to be something artificial in her emphasis. "It would be dreadful if you could not paint because of Mornie. I am sure he would hate to interfere with your work; he was such a dear about art and things like that."

"I put off a sitter to-day and one yesterday," Roger answered with seriousness.

"'The world and you will be the poorer,'" jeered Wilbur. "Go on, Leda. Devenish wants to know — we all want to know. Why did Ransby shoot himself?"

"You don't want to publish it? You won't publish it?" She got Roger's assurance, and then said, as if it were the merest commonplace:

"Poor Mornie killed himself because papa wanted him to take Esmé back."

"Come, come Leda! That's not the way to tell a story. Begin at the beginning. Remember Roger Macphail knows nothing of papa and his methods or of the Jerman passion for hushing up family scandals, keeping their tainted name from the public purview. Tell us of the marriage; of what manner of man was this Mornington Ransby who turned his back upon the world; of the events that led to the tragedy. Settle yourself comfortably.

Take advantage of the gathering dusk and all extraneous circumstances. Come over and sit by me on the fender stool; let the firelight play on your peroxide head."

She, too, had dramatic instinct, and the situation appealed instinctively to her.

Roger Macphail was celebrated, and she wished to impress him. He might easily become another scalp, and Leda collected scalps. She knew exactly where to sit, and that it was where she was and not by Keightley's side. She hesitated a little, and then said again the story must never be breathed outside those four walls. But after further encouragement from Keightley she went on more easily.

"We first met Mornie at a musical party at Menzas'. Esmé was one of Menzas' pupils, and he accompanied her when she sang 'Good Night and Good-bye,' that incomparable masterpiece ——"

"Muckispiece."

"Don't interrupt. I can't go on if you interrupt, if you cramp my style."

"I am dumb. Proceed, but don't, I implore you, copy the popular novelist's methods too closely — abjure adjectives."

"Esmé sang. She looked lovely in pale blue and a Madonna manner, like a Murillo. Mornie fell speechlessly in love. We all saw him doing it. He asked Menzas to introduce him. Esmé deprecated his compliments about her singing in her

childish, embarrassed way, looking at him shyly, and then dropping her lids. We knew the way so well because we used to see her practising it for hours before her looking-glass. But she could have been absolutely natural with Mornie. He was bowled over the first moment, and even listened for hours to papa's platitudes in order to be near her.

"Papa thought extremely well of him, and, in fact, said he was a 'worthy young man.' Papa has a habit of talking like that. But of course what really made him worthy in papa's eyes was an inheritance of about £25,000, and a growing income at the Bar. Curiously enough, Mornie was really a little like papa's encomium, like hot roast beef and suet pudding, and coming home to it after a Sunday sermon — quite good and domestic. He adored Esmé's saintliness, admitted that I was brilliantly clever and 'unhappily married,' believed that Alma was devoted to her children, and Sylvia to mamma. He even believed in mamma, and that in her youth she had been a great pianist. There was hardly anything that was told him that he did not believe. He was enchanted with the family as well as with Esmé."

"I don't know why I never met him while all this was going on?"

"I kept you a secret. Mornie had no taste for the bizarre, and he was always glad that 'under my trying circumstances I was so circumspect.'"

"Oh!"

"We all guarded his innocence. Poor dear! When he married he still had us all in his mind as various mythological goddesses in mid-Victorian clothes. The whole thing was a little hard on Esmé, but papa fawned on her to keep it up, positively fawned. They actually took a house in Bayswater — Bayswater! And when they came back from their honeymoon we all crowded round Esmé to see how she would behave. It looked at first as if she had grown into the skin of her part, as if she had become the plaster saint Mornie thought her. She wore nothing but a halo of domesticity and something substantial and brown out of her trousseau. She came to dinner with papa and talked of her 'housekeeping books' demurely. She took us all in, and we all played up to her. Alma put on her company manners and one would never have dreamed that she supplemented the marital stockbroker. We all began to believe that Menzas only gave Sylvia singing lessons ——"

"It is lucky Roger paints instead of writes, or I should put in an objection. I, myself, have always intended to write the story of the Jermans, in the manner of the Rougon-Macquart series."

"You would not make us credible. Don't forget we are all in society. Papa is so anxious that none of us should forget that."

Roger asked when it was that Mornington Ransby found his wife out.

"That is really the most important part of the story — the dramatic part. Esmé must have become the character she assumed, because when she fell in love, and falling in love was a habit with her, she did incredibly foolish things, like women in novels."

"For instance?"

"Mornie wanted Esmé's picture painted, and either Alma or Sylvia suggested Gordon Graem. Gordon Graem! I don't suppose you ever heard of him. He is of the great chocolate-box school. You know, Keightley, what a strong sense of humour Sylvia has. Gordon found Esmé a very difficult subject. At first she gave him a two hours' sitting, but afterwards I think it took about six to get her posed. At first she went twice a week, and then three times, and then every day. Gordon said he wanted to study her expression at all times and under all circumstances, that the picture was going to be his masterpiece. She played at being Emma, Lady Hamilton, and that Gordon Graem was Romney! He dined with them, and they brought him to see papa. Papa does not approve of artists in a general way, but that of course did not prevent him finding Gordon Graem 'very respectful.'

"Mornie was very quaint and credulous, and

quite sympathetic to all Gordon's difficulties with his subject. Gordon attempted Esmé as a mediæval saint, and a Madonna, as a Dryad, and Ceres, and all sorts of things, gravely discussing each new suggestion with her husband.

"It could have gone on almost for ever, certainly a year or two, or until Esmé tired of him. She was sure to have tired of him. Gordon was fair and flabby, wore his hair a little too long, and his clothes a little too *négligé*, talked of High Art, and painted like Leighton. It had actually been going on for about two months, and not only the whole family, but all our friends knew exactly what was happening. Then, one day, about eleven o'clock in the morning, as Keightley's friend, the popular novelist, would write, 'I was surprised at my toilette' by an amazed servant coming up and saying, 'Mr. Ransby is in the drawing-room and asks if you will see him at once. He says it is very urgent.' To continue from the same MS. notes, 'I hastily donned my wrapper,' and descended. Mornie was standing by the window looking extraordinarily tall and lachrymose. When I first spoke to him he did not seem to hear me.

" 'Esmé has left me,' he said. He seemed really unhappy about it, and as if he were going to cry. I was startled; it seemed so unnecessary. I said:

" 'Oh, no, Mornie; I am sure you have made a



mistake. Why should she? Everything was going on so nicely.'

" 'She has gone away with Gordon Graem,' he said, in the most tragic way you could imagine.

" Nothing I could say would convince him that it was impossible. Esmé had determined apparently on doing everything in the most elementary manner. She had even left him a letter! He said he did not know how he could break the contents to papa. He seemed quite stunned. I tried to console him, and said she would probably soon come back, and that Gordon Graem was really not amusing and would be certain to bore her, and all the right sort of thing. But he did not seem to understand what I was saying.

" You can imagine the scene when papa came in. Papa first raved and then wept; mamma retired to bed and said she was 'prostrated,' sent for a doctor, several new novels from the circulating library, ordered beef-tea and a sweetbread cooked in cream. . . .

" When papa had finished raving and weeping, he said he must find where the misguided girl had gone; must follow and bring her back. He assured Mornie it was all a mistake, that he was sure there was some explanation, some quite simple explanation. When Mornie went away papa sent telegrams to my brothers and talked in quotations about

his grey hairs being brought in sorrow to the grave, and about King Lear. At the end of three days he managed to discover that Esmé had gone to Paris. He followed them and met Gordon Graem in the hall of the Grand Hotel. I did tell you that he had my brother Stacy with him, didn't I? Stacy spoke to Gordon and asked about Esmé. Papa was too agitated. Gordon, you know, was soft and sloppy, and he had always been very poor. Neither papa nor Stacy have high sensibilities, and Stacy told me they came to the point very soon. Papa raved a little about morality, which embarrassed Gordon a good deal. But when Stacy asked bluntly, as they had arranged, what Gordon would take to go away at once, to America or Australia, everything was quite easy.

"The one thing that makes me think less of Gordon Graem is that he was satisfied with so little. I am sure papa would have given him five thousand pounds. But he offered five hundred to begin with—you know papa was in business when he was a young man, and he loves bargaining. Gordon jumped at it, simply jumped at it, Stacy told me. He had never had so much money of his own in his life.

"He accepted all the terms; he never even said good-bye to Esmé. Stacy saw him off at the Gare du Nord within an hour.

"Of course when papa and Stacy saw Esmé and

told her that Gordon had gone, she made a fearful scene. But as there was nothing left to do she agreed to come back with them to England.

"Papa brought her home to Kensington Gardens Square, and went at once to Mornie, telling him how bitterly and how quickly she had repented, and how unhappy she was and anxious for his forgiveness. Papa also mentioned that Graem was going to America.

"Mornie behaved like an angel. He never said a word to papa about what he thought of Esmé, nor of what he intended to do, but he went down to Southampton with Tom Brandon and met Gordon on his way to the steamer. Tom told me no man had ever had such a thrashing before. Gordon Graem had to go to a hotel and send for a doctor. People came round and asked what it was all about. I think a policeman offered to take Mornie into custody, but Gordon had the sense not to charge him.

"Then he came back to town and filed his petition.

"Papa practically sat on the doorstep of Westbourne Crescent when he heard of this, crying and imploring Mornie to forgive his 'poor daughter,' asking him if he was going to ruin a girl of twenty-four for a moment's indiscretion, drawing a piteous picture of her state of mind, of her repentance and longing for his forgiveness. Papa has really a vivid

imagination. He worked upon Mornie's feelings with such good result that in the end he agreed to an interview with Esmé. Of course he still adored her.

"I saw Mornie directly after the interview. He walked up and down this room and told me what had happened. Esmé did not play papa's game at all. She could not get over the way Gordon had been spirited away from her, and knew nothing of the thrashing at Southampton. She was still in love with him, and told Mornie so. She told him, too, how bored she had been during her two years of married life. He poured it all out to me, and how papa came to fetch her, and of their three-cornered talk. Papa begged and implored that there should be no divorce, that what he called 'the fair fame' of the family should not be tarnished. Esmé cried and said she loved Gordon Graem, and would go to him in America or join him anywhere.

"Mornie was quite distracted as he told me this, and walked up and down the room.

"I comforted him and told him it would all blow over, and that if necessary papa would send Gordon another five hundred pounds to keep him out of the way, and that he had decided to give Esmé no pocket money so that she could not pay her passage. He could not grasp the point at all. He said if Esmé loved Gordon Graem she must go to him. He seemed to think papa was quite right in not wanting

the blot of a divorce on our family escutcheon. You see, he really was kind and nice. I told him that all of us — Alma and Sylvia, as well as I — would be more than sisters to him, and that we were all quite as good-looking as Esmé, and rather cleverer. But he did not show any gratitude.

“He and Esmé had another interview, and yet another. Then he went down to his sister who lived in Wimbledon. It is really a place where people play tennis. But his sister actually does live there! Absurd, isn’t it?

“He wrote to us all; it was puerile of George Lauser to say the letters were destroyed, or never written. Mornie wrote papa that he saw no other way out. To Esmé that he would not stand between her and her heart’s desire. To me quite a dear letter, thanking me for having been so kind to him. He said Esmé must have her freedom without the shame of a divorce, that none of us must be hurt. . . .

“Papa was *so* pleased when he heard poor Mornie had committed suicide. You know, papa *is* like that; he can’t help it. Everything was to be hushed up; no one now would ever know that Esmé had been what papa now called ‘a little indiscreet.’ Poor Mornie! I think he behaved very well, don’t you?”

When she had finished speaking there was a silence in the room. Even Keightley, for a mo-

ment, was unable to think of an epigram. Roger Macphail was dumbfounded at the callousness of the revelation and the attitude of the mind it revealed.

Naturally it was Keightley who recovered himself first. He got up from his chair and stood beside Leda, his hand upon her shoulder. Then he said:

"I suppose, Macphail, you will admit now the jury brought in the right verdict?" He laughed that little half-stifled characteristic laugh of his. "Mornington Ransby shot himself to save a slur on the fair fame of the Germans! 'Suicide whilst of unsound mind.' What else *could* the verdict be?"

Roger answered, half-mechanically:

"'Greater love hath no man than this . . .'"

He, too, rose, but Leda begged him not to go yet. She told Keightley not to paw her, and he moved away from the sofa again.

"Esmé looks lovely in her widow's weeds, and speaks of Mornie so beautifully. Wouldn't you like to meet her? Of course she won't go out yet, not for quite a long time. But I could get her here. Mornie left her all his money; she is quite independent of papa now."

"And I suppose she will go to America by the first fast boat?" asked Keightley.

"Oh, no, no; of course not. You don't know

Esmé; she is quite like she used to be again. I dined in Kensington Square last night. Sir Rupert Douran was there. Esmé was drooping her lids and looking angelic. You know we have no title in the family. Esmé reminded us of that when we sat together in the drawing-room afterwards. And there was a very contemptuous notice of Gordon's work in one of the evening papers. Esmé said that if ever she was painted again it must be by Sargent or Mr. Macphail. I think she has quite got over it. And she is such a bad sailor! Sir Rupert is a little bald, but *so* sympathetic, she said."

Very soon afterwards Roger Macphail took his leave. Leda begged him to come again.

"You do think Mornie was a dear, don't you? I am going to have an enlarged photograph of him for my writing table. Papa has ordered a marble monument, such an original design — a broken column. You *will* come and see me again, won't you? And do paint another orchid. . . ."

In justice to our one and only artist it must be said that the story behind the verdict, now he had heard it, did not send him back to his work with an easy mind. It was some time before he could paint at all, and then he refused an offer that reached him, through Keightley, to paint the Jerman sisters in a family group under the title "The Innocents at Home" as a birthday present for their father.

## CHAPTER IV

### MEDICAL ETIQUETTE

*"An inquiry into the death of Mrs. Eulalie Ince, wife of Dr. Marcus Ince, of 111 Clarges Street, Mayfair, was opened to-day at St. Pancras."*

Dr. Ince, who was the first witness to enter the box, said that on the evening of the 16th inst. he was called out about 8.30. His wife had been indisposed and was already in bed. He was detained all night at a confinement case, and knew nothing of the circumstances until he returned home about seven in the morning to find the street main overflowing, water flooding the gutters, a policeman on the doorstep, a fireman in the dining-room, two salvage men on the staircase, disorder and a smell of smoke throughout the house. He heard that his wife had been severely burnt and was now in St. Michael's Hospital. He went round there as soon as he had washed and changed his clothes.

He explained that he was a St. Michael's man himself and had no difficulty in obtaining admittance even at that early hour. He found his wife conscious, although in considerable pain. She told him that she had had a cigarette in bed and must



have fallen asleep. The first thing she remembered was a feeling of suffocation, then all at once she saw that the bedclothes were in flames and the room full of smoke. She remembered her terror and frantic attempts to reach the bell.

Dr. Ince was visibly affected in recalling his wife's words. In reply to a question he said he believed she was in the habit of taking hot whisky or rum and water by way of a nightcap. She was a heavy sleeper.

Dr. Ernest Trollope, the next witness, senior house physician at St. Michael's, deposed that Mrs. Ince was brought there about eleven o'clock on the night of the 16th inst., suffering from extensive burns, which he proceeded to describe, and also from shock. The burns were dressed with boracic lotion, and she was given an ounce of brandy. Dr. Trollope then detailed the further treatment, and said the patient progressed satisfactorily during the two days she remained in the hospital. At the expiration of which time, at the request of her husband, but with his own full concurrence, she was removed to a nursing home in Fitzroy Gardens, where she passed into the care of Dr. Leonard Boyne.

"She died, I believe, two days later?" the coroner asked.

"Four days later," Dr. Trollope corrected.

"Do you attribute her death in any way to her removal to the home?"

"I know nothing of the case after she left the hospital," the witness answered punctiliously and a little stiffly.

Dr. Leonard Boyne was then called. But he was not in court, and Dr. Ince rose in his place and asked if he might make a statement. Leave having been given, he said Dr. Boyne had been offered, and accepted, a post in the Midlands, and it having been advisable to proceed to take up his duties at once, he (Dr. Ince) thought it unnecessary for him to remain in London for the purpose of giving evidence here. His good friends, Sir Daniel Custance and Dr. Gregory, two of the most distinguished physicians in London, had seen his wife in consultation, separately and together, during the four days she was in the nursing home in Fitzroy Gardens. They were both in court, and ready to tell the jury what had occurred.

The two distinguished physicians, one after the other, gave practically identical evidence. Sir Daniel said that at Dr. Ince's request he saw the deceased on the morning of the 20th inst., two days after she had left the hospital, and again in the afternoon with Dr. Gregory. Jaundice had appeared, and the patient was obviously extremely ill. Dr. Leonard Boyne was present as well as Dr. Ince. They all agreed in diagnosing a duodenal ulcer that had opened into the bile duct, a not uncommon result of shock from extensive burning. She died on

the fourth day, the colour and general condition confirming their diagnosis.

The coroner asked Dr. Gregory if he was right in assuming that the actual cause of death was acute jaundice, accruing on the shock of the burns.

Dr. Gregory made a few technical observations which puzzled and bored the jurymen, but was understood to agree on the whole with the coroner's summary.

The jury were then directed to their finding, and a verdict of "Death from misadventure" was placed on record. There was no post-mortem.

But for the interest in the verdicts of coroners' juries taken by that well-known and brilliant young *littérateur*, Mr. Keightley Wilbur, nothing more might ever have been heard of this case, which, superficially at least, appeared of an ordinary nature, concealing no story and suggesting nothing unusual or significant. Mr. David Devenish, of the *Daily Grail*, was quite satirical when Keightley brought up the subject over luncheon at the Savoy grill.

"You are suffering from inquestitis. Having made up your mind that the object of an inquiry before a coroner is always to conceal a story or a crime, you will soon be at the point where no one will be run over or fall from a ladder, where no cyclist will collide with a cow, where there won't be a breakdown in the tube, or a railway accident, a

fire or a fall of masonry, without your seeing something mysterious in the occurrence."

"The Dominie Devenish! Thanks, dear sir, for your little lecture. Have you by any chance read the evidence in this case?"

"I have."

"And seen nothing unusual in it?"

"The woman smoked in bed and set the bed-clothes on fire. Possibly she had a posset and slept heavily. No, I can't say I saw anything at all out of the way in that."

"Well, I will presently add a little more to your meagre information and inadequate imagination. But first I'll order lunch. What are you going to have? What a sybarite you are! Foie gras and entrecôte à la minute." To the attendant waiter he added: "Bring me two poached eggs on anchovy toast and a cup of coffee." And then went on: "Do you happen to know Dr. Ince?"

"Even so."

"You know he has a large theatrical practice?"

"That, too."

"And meets most attractive and beautiful women?"

"Are you going to suggest that he left his confinement case, rushed back to Clarges Street and committed arson in order to rid himself of his wife?"

"Is thy servant a dog?"

"You don't mind if I go on with my lunch, do you? You asked me if I knew Dr. Ince. I have known him more or less well for a number of years. I don't want to interrupt your ride on your fiery and untamed hobby-horse, but I am going to suggest that in this particular instance you are riding for a fall. Ince is a very good fellow."

"Did you know his wife?"

"I knew he had a wife."

"And that she was *not* Milly Mordaunt."

"Milly Mordaunt!" David answered with a touch of scorn.

"Milly is all that you imply; more. But her red hair and skeletonia are quite attractive," Keightley answered, thoughtfully stirring his coffee.

"If you wish to suggest that Ince was on friendly or even intimate terms with Milly I may tell you it is *secret de Polichinelle*."

"But I don't, oh sapient sir! Ince's wife was an octoroon, ignorant, jealous of him, and, of late, had acquired the habit of lifting the little finger."

"According to Milly?"

"According to Milly. I admit of this last item she was my informant."

Keightley was quite good-tempered, David's satire made no impression on him.

"Ride on," said the journalist.

"Ince is of attractive appearance, popular with women, clever in his profession, a rising man. You

will admit that he was handicapped by such a wife as I describe?"

"But I won't admit that he set her on fire, and then went back to tell Milly."

"Don't you think it a curious thing that the doctor in charge of the case was not there to give evidence? That his place was taken by two consultants who, as you know, are more or less dependent on general practitioners; professors of medical etiquette, skilled in the art of non-committal."

"It had not occurred to me."

"The truth now. Am I not beginning to interest you?"

"Every man is interesting when on his hobby." David leaned back in his chair and used his toothpick. "I am going to have an omelette au rhum, so you may bolt along, over any obstacles or tracts of flat commonplaces. What else have you learnt from Milly about Ince's wife? By the way, Ince will not materially improve his position if he made a funeral pyre for his wife in order to marry Milly!"

"You think badly of her?" Keightley asked with uplifted eyebrows.

"Don't be absurd."

"She is one of the best dancers on the variety stage," he said meditatively.

"Possibly."

"However, that is not the point. Every man to his taste. You, for instance, may prefer musical comedy."

David reddened, and Keightley at once apologised.

"Sorry. It slipped out."

There was one subject never mentioned between those two men; Keightley had forgotten, and now apologised. They were friends, almost intimates. The link that bound them was one of common interests and daily association. They frequented the same eating-houses, were members of the same clubs. But there were deep-lying and essential differences between them. Devenish was a man of reticences and reserves, ten years, at least, the other's senior. Keightley Wilbur was an easier man to summarise. The essence of him was an acute and almost passionate egotism. He was ultra-modern, and until recently one had said that nothing absorbed him but literature and his own contribution to it. David Devenish was watching his new development closely, and although aware of its origin, wondered what it portended and where it would lead.

Now, when Keightley persisted in pursuing the Ince matter and was urgent for his sympathy, he soon yielded.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked.

"You've got your fellows at the *Daily Grail* who are a cross between reporters and detectives. Find

out for me, through them, where Ince was all that night — at what confinement?"

"Anything else?" David asked him with a dry smile. "Do you want to know whether it was a boy, or a girl, or twins?"

Keightley disregarded him and went on:

"And whether Dr. Leonard Boyne took up that appointment. What *was* the appointment in the Midlands that was so urgent Dr. Boyne could not even delay to take it up for a couple of days? Who obtained it for him?"

"Milly has nothing to do with your particular interest in this case, by the way, I suppose? You are not trying to cut out Ince, by any chance?"

"I've done with women, my dear fellow," Keightley sighed sententiously. "I've no use for them."

"Oh, yes, of course; I forgot that. You are nearly twenty-eight, and an anchorite. . . ."

"I'll tell you an astonishing thing; you won't believe it, but I'll tell you all the same. There is only one woman in the world that I care to talk to for more than half an hour at a time, who has the brains to understand and the capacity to hold me."

"And this remarkable and unique woman?"

"My mother."

David had almost forgotten that Wilbur possessed such a luxury, although he had more than once been entertained at their house.



"And I suppose you are an only son?"

Keightley smiled and knew what the supposition meant. But he did not resent it, rather the contrary.

"She knew I was a genius before the world did."

"And is she pleased that you are now devoting yourself to the coroners' courts?"

"Whatever I do is right in her eyes."

"I suspected it," David replied unfeelingly.

Two or three evenings later, Keightley, seeing Ellaline Blaney supping with David as usual, strolled up to them.

"Sit down," said David; "I've got some news for you."

"And I for you," answered Keightley, sending for a chair, and telling Ellaline at the same time that he had been at the Gaiety that night and found her in fine voice.

"Dr. Ince was *not* engaged on the whole of the evening of the 16th at a case, as he testified. He supped with Milly Mordaunt at Murray's."

"Good. And now for mine. If Dr. Leonard Boyne took up an appointment in the Midlands his people knew nothing about it. My mother met his sister at a bridge party. She said her brother had been ill, was suffering from a nervous breakdown.

My mother asked who was attending him, and she said 'Dr. Ince.'"

"Is that that nice Dr. Ince who comes to all our first nights?" Ellaline asked innocently. "Wasn't that awfully sad about his wife? Did you see it in the papers? She was smoking in bed and set the clothes on fire. I've never had a cigarette in bed since," she went on, "except in the mornings."

"I did not know you knew Ince," David said to her.

"Oh, everybody knows Dr. Ince," she answered, "he's such a dear. I think his eyes are so beautiful, don't you? He's been awfully kind to lots of girls I know."

"Do you know Milly Mordaunt?" Keightley asked quickly, unthinkingly.

"No, I do not," Ellaline answered with a toss of her head, and emphatically, her colour rising. "I don't know any of that sort."

"My apologies."

But she was offended with him after that and would hardly speak. He left them shortly. He had forgotten there are as many grades in the half as in the whole world, and that the great music-hall *artiste* might not be considered a fit associate for the *cantatrice* of the musical comedy stage.

"Will you be here to-morrow? I'll see you to-morrow, then," Keightley said to David as he went. He had a sense of relief in escaping, and was glad

that it was David and not he who would have Ella-line's wrath to assuage. But he was amused, too, and thought Milly might be. Milly really moved in most excellent society; Keightley himself had met her in the company of an English duchess, an American divorcé, and a Russian millionaire, when she was playing in the revue at the Calambra Palace Theatre.

When Keightley Wilbur got home it was somewhere about three in the morning, for he had stayed late at the Garrick Club discussing crime with Harry Irving. He went straight to his mother's room.

"Are you awake, mater?" he asked, after knocking at the door, but going in without waiting for the answer.

"Well, if I were not, I am. You have taken care of that."

Keightley's mother was almost as unusual as himself, and would have had a personality if his had not absorbed it. Left a widow at six and twenty, with one little boy who already represented the past, the present, and the future, she had set her entire mentality and heart on becoming the perfect mother. She would have accomplished it but that he developed too quickly for her, and she became instead an intimate and appreciative companion; their relationship really rare and wonderful. For she respected his intellect and he admitted that it proved her own.

"You must get hold of that sister of Boyne's

and find out where he is. I couldn't go to bed without telling you. I've got Devenish interested now, and H. B. We *must* find out what happened. I woke you, didn't I?"

"It doesn't matter; I can sleep to-morrow. I wish I could remember the woman's name."

"Why, Boyne, of course."

"No, she was married. I'll think of it presently. If not, I can find out from Mrs. Charteris."

"The thing has got on my mind. I feel as badly about it as Macphail did over the Mornington Ransby matter. I'm perfectly certain Ince killed his wife, and I must know how he did it. I can't paint ——"

"You never could, you know," she reminded him, "nor even draw."

"I mean I can't write."

"Never mind, you still dress very well."

"Quite true, old woman. What a comfort you are to me. You'll find out, won't you, as quickly as possible? If you've been in bed since ten you've had quite a lot of sleep already. You could ring up Mrs. Charteris as early as nine, I should think."

"But you don't want to be called so soon?"

"I? No! But I want it all cut and dried when I do get up. I don't want to have to wait. I want Leonard Boyne's sister's name and address; and to hear how one can get at her."

"I'll do my best."

She never even mentioned that she had not gone to bed at ten but at one, and that she, too, liked to sleep late in the morning.

With his shaving water at eleven o'clock next day Keightley got a pencilled note from his mother.

"Dr. Leonard Boyne's sister is Mrs. Devereux, 204 Lexham Gardens. Her brother is staying with her. I can ask her here to dinner and bridge if you like, and put you next to her at the table."

"Say the answer is 'Yes, please, and the sooner the better,'" he told the man.

He heard later on, before he went out, that a little party of six had been arranged for the following evening. His mother told him.

"You can talk to Mrs. Devereux as long as you like without spoiling the game. If you want to go out afterwards it leaves us a table of five."

"If the entire selection of a mother had been left to me I should have chosen you. I can never be sufficiently grateful to my father for having made the discovery in time."

At fifty it is good that a woman who has never had a lover should find one in her son. Mrs. Wilbur was the happiest of her sex and bore the impress of it on her young and distinguished face. Both mother and son had the same bright dark eyes and slender grace.

On the night of the bridge party, in her clinging black *crêpe de chine* dress and fine rope of pearls, she justified his quickly forthcoming admiration; her neck was thin and white, almost like a girl's, and her hair was sleek and black like his own.

"We're a handsome couple," was all he actually said when he met her in the drawing-room, but she saw the appreciation in his eyes.

"It's a pity your nose is so long," was her reply.

He walked over to the looking-glass and adjusted his tie.

"Is it? I rather like it."

Then the first of the guests were announced. Three of them were merely people who played bridge; a bald stockbroker, a heavy major, and a flat-chested woman with restless, bony hands. Mrs. Devereux, who was assigned to Keightley, was young, rather pretty, and nervously flirtatious. Keightley's reputation was known to her, and she was soon all in a flutter with his strange speeches and implication of having become immediately enamoured. Her hair was fair and as fluffy as her mind. Although she had not thought of it before, she was soon persuaded her husband did not understand her, and that there were depths in her, hitherto unrevealed, to which Keightley Wilbur alone had the key. Keightley did this sort of thing very well indeed, although he was seldom able to keep it up for any length of time. Before dinner was over

Alma Devereux was persuaded her host's desire to meet her brother was due to the necessity he felt of getting into closer touch with herself and she had already invited him to tea!

"Leonard is a little like me in some things; we are very fond of each other, but he is not at his best just now. Did you see that case in the paper about a Mrs. Ince who was burnt to death? She was a patient of his, and he was fearfully upset when she died like that."

"I think I did see something about it. He gave evidence at the inquest, didn't he?"

"Oh, no. Dr. Ince thought it better not, it had taken such a hold upon his mind."

"Dr. Ince?"

"Such a charming man, so kind and sympathetic, and devoted to Leonard."

"Not too kind and sympathetic to *you*, I hope."

She blushed unbecomingly, too near her ears, and said:

"Oh, no; only to Leonard. He offered to pay his expenses if he went a sea voyage. Dr. Ince thought that would be the best thing for his nerves. You know doctors attend each other and their wives for nothing. Dr. Ince said as Leonard was a young man and just beginning practice he must accept a fee."

"The sea voyage was to be the fee?"

"Yes."

Keightley made his escape after dinner without going upstairs again, but explained his disappearance credibly.

"Now that we have talked together like this I should not care to see you with counters or cards, winning or losing money, engaged sordidly. . . ."

She said eagerly she would just as soon not play at all this evening. But he only sighed in response, as if he realised that to ask such a sacrifice from her would be unfair, *as yet*.

"To-morrow, at four-thirty, I will come and see your brother, your house, your surroundings, *you*, in your own setting."

He collected her fan, her gloves, her bag — she was the sort of woman who drops everything — looked sentimental until she had followed his mother out of the room, and then swore at her softly.

He told David that night that the clue was in his hands.

"Did you ever play hide-and-seek, Devenish? I'm getting hot, I'm as near it as possible. What's the betting that by this day week I shall be able to show you how right I've been all through?"

He was excited, triumphant, and David answered coolly:

"Anything is possible, even that you should be right."

"We'll dine together, not here, but at the club.



Meet me at the Buckingham at 8.15 a week from to-day. See if I haven't a story for you."

"The food is better at the Orleans."

"The Orleans, then."

Keightley found the Lexham Gardens house very much what he expected. There were palms in blue pots and inferior water-colour drawings on white-papered walls, a parlourmaid over-capped and aproned, obviously inquisitive, and the fair and fluffy mistress of the house over-dressed and excited. But for the brother he would have found the visit difficult to get through. He was not offered a cigarette; there were too many cakes with the tea, cakes with sugared tops and filled with cream that came too obviously from a confectioner's.

Dr. Leonard Boyne was about seven- or eight-and-twenty, tall and awkwardly built. He had thick fair hair, badly cut; a loose mouth half open, big, awkward hands. He sprawled on a chair too small for him and talked as if he had adenoids.

Keightley was most elegantly incongruous with this brother and sister. Alma longed that callers should come in and see him here. When her wish materialised, and a golfing girl in a last season's hat was ushered in, Keightley found the opportunity for which he had been waiting.

"Ought you to be in doors all day?" he asked the doctor. "I know you've been seedy, but surely

the open air is a good thing. Come for a spin with me in the car. Don't you think that would be good for him, Mrs. Devereux?" Mrs. Devereux hurriedly thought it would, and hastily feared it would not. Keightley said softly:

"There is no use my staying now," and implied the golfing girl was in the way.

Finally, and with intense relief, he found himself outside, with his prize secured and lounging by his side in a big check overcoat and an impossible hat. Having given the chauffeur instructions, Keightley found his heart was actually beating a little faster than usual, and he was more excited than he had been since he corrected his first proof. He had given himself a week, but he thought now there was no reason his self-imposed task should not be more quickly accomplished. The sooner the better. Otherwise he saw himself condemned to other afternoon teas with Alma, sending her flowers, making love to her; an immense sacrifice in the cause of truth and justice.

"I told the man to take us to Burford Bridge; it's the best way out of London. What knocked you up like this? You look strong enough."

"Worry," was the answer. And he added hastily, "I'm not as strong as I look."

Dr. Leonard Boyne, unlike Mr. Keightley Wilbur, did not wish to talk about himself, although Keightley did his best to draw him out, not only on

this, but on several subsequent occasions. The worst of it was that the young sawbones did not really know what a condescension it was that a Keightley Wilbur should be seeking his friendship. He was really simple-minded and should have been a parson. The first confession he made to Keightley was that he had been "shoved into medicine." It appeared he had an uncle with a large country practice and no son.

"I suppose that is where you were going when this Ince case intervened?" Keightley asked carelessly.

Five days he had been driving him out, sitting with him in Alma Devereux's uncongenial drawing-room, yet this was the first real opening. Leonard Boyne answered lightly:

"Oh, no. There was no idea of my going there for another two or three years."

To-day they were in the dining-room at Carlton House Terrace. Lunch, at which Mrs. Wilbur had declined to join them, was over. She had admitted to finding Keightley's new friend uncongenial.

"It is one of the few drawbacks of gambling, that nice people, like ourselves, don't do it. As I must play cards I have to consort with all sorts and conditions of men and women, but I am not going to encourage your associating with their impossible relatives."

Keightley had had to remind her that he had a

reason for seeking the society of Dr. Leonard Boyne.

"I am sorry you don't like him, but I must bring him here all the same. I really can't take him to any of my clubs. Look at his clothes and his boots! Heavens! Mater, if ever I should be ill, you will be careful about my medical attendant, won't you?"

"Of course. I wouldn't think of sending for anybody who did not dress from Poole or Scholte."

"Quite a good idea. However, I feel very fit at the moment, and I think I shall get what I want from this lout. The Lexham Gardens furniture is coming between me and my rest, and a man can't be confidential in a motor."

This conversation had taken place that very morning. Dr. Boyne looked almost as incongruous in Carlton House Terrace as his host had done in Lexham Gardens. But Keightley was getting impatient. Five days out of the seven he had given himself were already gone.

When Dr. Boyne said he was not joining his uncle for two or three years, Keightley asked quickly:

"You are going to practise in London, then?" and whilst they were waiting for the next course pressed him as to his future plans.

"I don't know at all; I can't make up my mind. I had such bad luck with my first private case," the doctor began, hesitatingly.

He had eaten his plover, and the *baba* that fol-

lowed it, was making play now with biscuit and cheese. Keightley felt glad he had given him Pommerly, and now pushed the port towards him. "Such awful bad luck," Boyne said again, accepting the port, not testing and tasting it, as gentlemen should, but tossing it off gloomily.

"Losing your patient?" Keightley kept cool with difficulty.

"It wasn't only that . . ."

The tongue of Dr. Leonard Boyne was now really unloosened.

Two days later found Keightley Wilbur in the hall of the Orleans Club, waiting for David Devenish. He was in immaculate evening dress, his eyes brilliant, and his habitual air of being the only person in the world that mattered extraordinarily intensified.

David said, even before he was relieved of his coat:

"So you know all about it?"

"I told you I should. But how did you guess?"

"You look as if you were just going to flap your wings and say 'Cock-a-doodle-doo!'"

"What a difference there is between a journalist and a literary man! I could never have used a simile as stale as that."

"Couldn't you? That's a pity."

Now they were in the dining-room.

"Here, take the menu, Devenish; you'd better do the ordering. My tastes are simple. I always wonder why you don't put on flesh with all you eat."

"Talk about yourself, please, not about me." David's sense of personal dignity was acute. "Isn't there another play or poem due? I won't hear your story until after dinner."

"I'm collecting material. There is a drama and a half in this Ince story, to say nothing of a *lever de rideau*, a music-hall sketch, and a scene in a revue. . . ."

"I absolutely refuse to hear it until I've dined."

"I've a dashed good mind not to tell you at all."

David laughed scoffingly.

"As if you could keep that, or anything else, to yourself!"

They dined, and the Orleans justified itself. David selected with circumspection and deliberation the particular size of Upman cigars he affected, the liqueur, and gave minute directions for the preparation of his cup of Turkish coffee. Then, and not until then, he was ready for the story Keightley had come there to tell him. Keightley had mentioned meanwhile the amazing brilliancy of a new poem he was projecting for the *Review*.

"I will guarantee there is more bad language in it than in any recent poem; coarser words and finer thoughts, more perfect technique . . ."

"There is a time for everything. On to the hobby-horse! Ride; and I'll smoke meanwhile. *Did* Ince set his wife on fire?" David asked.

"No. But I never make a mistake. . . ."

"Say 'hardly ever.'"

"Never. He did *not* set his wife's bed on fire. But he *was* responsible for her death."

"You have definite evidence — incontrovertible?"

"Absolutely. But I knew it without any evidence; I have an instinct, a *flair*, it is growing in me, too. I knew when I read the case that there was something behind it. . . ."

"I had almost as soon believe that I would commit a murder myself," David commented reflectively, cutting the end of his cigar, tasting his coffee.

"Or I," said Keightley coolly.

David eyed him critically.

"You will end by giving yourself up," he said with conviction.

"Nothing I should ever do would surprise me. But I have the matter to think of. You know we've never talked that out. I was half-dazed with opium. I hadn't the least idea Pierre Lamotte couldn't swim. We were within half a dozen yards of the shore; there was a skiff and a dinghy outside. I don't want to excuse myself, but if you must bring it up ——"

"Well, go on about Ince."

"I will. But don't make any mistake; I have always been prepared to defend myself. I say, wouldn't it make a sensation! Wouldn't it sell the papers! 'Confession of Keightley Wilbur. How Pierre Lamotte Met with His Death!' But I can't do it," he added regretfully, with an impatient sigh. "I spend my whole life concealing myself candidly from the mater. I explained the whole affair to her so elaborately and disingenuously that I can't go back on it. And the worst of it is I can't quite remember what I did tell her. Anyway, she knows my interest in inquests dates from then. Isn't it strange, Devenish, what sacrifices we sons make for our mothers?"

"Astounding. But about Ince?"

"Devenish, I believe I am on the way to becoming a great criminologist. That affair of mine has given me a marvellous intuition — insight."

"Tell me a little more about yourself," David said satirically.

"You don't know anyone like me, do you?"

"I should be vaccinated against it."

Keightley smiled.

"Here goes, then. I will my tale unfold. . . ."

"A tale unsold."

"Don't be frivolous. Listen! When Ince was quite a young man, through with his examinations, and waiting for a hospital appointment, he went out as ship's surgeon on a cruise round the West Indian



Islands. In Jamaica he met, loved, and most hastily married a beautiful octoroon."

"The said Eulalie."

"On his return to England Ince got a hospital appointment, and in some odd way, I don't know exactly how, it led him to take a special interest in pharmaceuticals. Note this, because it is important.

"The marriage was not a success. Ince was clever and his wife stupid — more stupid, although it may seem to you impossible, than the average Englishwoman of middle class. She was the daughter of a planter, barely educated, a Eurasian. She knew nothing of housekeeping and lived on her emotions. Ince, presumably, is also emotional, but when his first amorousness was exhausted he found himself tied to something capable of jealousy, but not of sacrifice, greedy of his time and attention, exacting."

"I know the type; it comes also from Kensington."

"She was extravagant, like all idle women. And, of course, as long as Ince was doing really good work, he was not being well paid for it. To satisfy or silence her, he went into general practice; but succeeded in doing neither. She made him talk of his patients and grew promptly jealous of them. In fact, to put it shortly, she led him a devil of a life! That was before she took to drink. Afterwards, as you may imagine, things were no better.

Altogether, she was not a very agreeable companion. A year or two ago he began to supplement her with Milly. *Secret de Polichinelle*, as you say. Milly sprained her ankle, and Ince signed the bulletins; her condition necessitated constant attention from her physician. Eulalie thought him over-attentive, and there were scenes. . . . What would have happened had there been no accident I do not know. Is there such a word as hindermate? There ought to be. There are so many more of them than helpmates."

"Keep to your theme. I'll discuss etymology with you another time."

"I've got you guessing, haven't I? Mrs. Ince probably went to bed fuddled the night she set the bedclothes on fire. But that's by the way. Ince, as you know, spent his evening with Milly. She is quite great in the new *revue*. At Murray's they supped and tangoed, and he saw her home. Then you get his return to the devastated house in Clarges Street and his visit to the hospital.

"When the idea came into his mind I don't know; nobody will ever know. I'll give you facts; you must draw your own conclusions. In the hospital Ince could do nothing. So he yanked her out of it and into a nursing home. Medical etiquette decreed he could not doctor her himself. He therefore selected for her attendant Dr. Leonard Boyne, also a St. Michael's man, who, he must have known, was an ass. Now mark what occurs. I have it straight

from Boyne, who knows nothing of all I have just told you, who is convinced he was responsible for his patient's death, who has no idea he was merely a tool, an instrument.

"In the hospital Mrs. Ince's burns had been dressed with boracic lotion. In the nursing home an aqueous solution of picric acid was substituted — a newer and later treatment. At whose suggestion? Boyne does not remember; he cannot say. He thinks it was his own idea. But, of course, it wasn't; he is not the sort of man to have ideas, only to adopt them. Anyway, he *has* a very clear recollection of saying to somebody, possibly to one of the nurses, that it was a dry and disagreeable dressing. '*Why not combine it with lanoline; make it into an ointment?*' Now, who said that? Who could have said it? Not the patient herself; most improbably a nurse. 'I suppose it must have come suddenly into my head,' the poor fool told me. Within twelve hours of the wounds being dressed with this preparation the patient became deeply jaundiced; within forty-eight she was dead!"

"What had happened?" David asked. "I don't follow you."

"The lanoline had carried the picric acid poison through the system, *as any experienced pharmacist must have known that it would!* Mrs Ince neither died from burns nor from duodenal ulcer. She died of picric acid poisoning!"

He broke off.

"Wasn't it deuced clever and subtle, Devenish? Boyne wrote the prescription. Ince says he could not have made such a suggestion, such a mistake; he has explained the impossibility, and Boyne believes him. One could make Boyne believe almost anything. Wasn't it devilish . . . and brilliant?"

David answered slowly:

"What about the two specialists? Didn't they ask how the wounds had been treated? Didn't they know the effect of lanoline in combination with picric acid?"

"You have to remember that fetish of medical etiquette again, and the fact that work not paid for is generally work scamped. These men saw Ince's wife in consultation with Ince, and without a fee. Do you think they went very carefully into matters, or that Ince had any fear that they would, with him to guide them in the wrong direction? They went there to do Ince a cheap kindness, and they got away again as quickly as possible."

Keightley then went more into detail, and explained how Ince had worked upon Boyne's fears, talking to him of "culpable ignorance," "negligence," expressing himself doubtful as to what view a jury might take. He confused all the issues, finally agreeing to cover Boyne's error, but binding him to silence, entangling him in his silence, and presently in his gratitude.

"I'd have sworn to Ince," David said in the end, involuntarily, the exclamation breaking from him.

"Would you? I dare say you would. There is something of the altruist about you for all your affectation of cynicism."

"I could tell a story showing the other side of Ince's character," David Devenish said more slowly.

"It isn't a nice job you've taken on, Wilbur; a spy is a useful person in war, but in private life. . . ."

Keightley reddened.

"Who said anything against Ince? That which is illegal is not invariably immoral. The woman would have ultimately drunk herself to death, destroying his and her own self-respect first. I'd like to open the whole question of justifiable homicide. I'll do a column for you if you like, and give you my own case, without names, as an illustration. Jove! wouldn't they talk! As for being a spy, I'm a psychologist, an investigator, a student of life."

David rose impatiently, and threw his cigar into the fire.

"It is a sickening world," he said. "I am going down to the theatre. Are you coming my way?"

"You are not going to print this story, then?"

"You knew that, didn't you, when you told it me?"

"Well, yes, I suppose I did."

"There is one thing," said the journalist cynic-

ally, when they got into the street, "retribution lies in wait for him."

"How?"

"You told me he was going to marry Milly. Don't you think that will be punishment enough? What sort of wives do these public women make; these egoists on the hearth, applause ringing in their ears, deafening them to household sounds?"

"So *you* know that now," Keightley answered as he hailed a taxicab.

## CHAPTER V

### THE SEDDON-BATTYES

KEIGHTLEY WILBUR, inconsistently with his amazing egotism, was extraordinarily perceptive. He was accustomed to thinking of his mother as happy and content with her life. When he was with her she was always at her happiest. And, indeed, on such occasions it seemed to him impossible she could have anything more for which to wish. She adored him, and although, as he said, his own feelings were more reasoned and less emotional, he freely admitted that he really liked her in many ways better than any other woman he had ever known. The terms on which they lived together gratified his taste, and her companionship gave him an utter sense of security. She admired his person, understood and appreciated his wildest paradoxes, was never tired of listening to revised versions of anything he wrote. He revised a great deal, and tested her with every change, almost of a comma or stop. Sometimes, but very rarely, he accepted a suggestion from her, and although he always lamented her literary limitations and that she had not had a classical education, her appreciation was nevertheless pleasant, and he conceded to her a great natural intelligence.

A few days after he had completed his investigations into the Ince case, coming home unexpectedly about tea-time, he found this happy mother of his in the drawing-room alone, and with reddened eyelids. He adjusted the blind, to make sure, and found, as usual, that he had not made a mistake.

"Why are you alone? You didn't know I was coming in to tea."

"No. But I hoped it. I told James to deny me to callers."

"To say you were out, in short?"

"As you say."

"Then probably there will be no hot cakes?"

"Oh, yes. I hope so."

"Did you lose much last night?"

"No. I won a little."

"Got a headache?"

"No."

"New dress a failure?"

"Fits like a glove."

"You had better tell me what is wrong."

"Why should you think there is anything wrong?"

"I don't *think*. Lesser people think. *I* know."

"Veda has lost her baby." Her face was averted, the words came out like a sob.

"Absurd!"

She looked up abruptly, the sob was strangled in her throat.



"What do you mean by absurd?" The word actually startled her. Her mood, for once, was almost antipathetic to him. Almost, not quite. Five minutes with him and it would veer round. Already he had arrested her attention, dried her tears.

"Absurd that the loss of such a recent acquaintance should make you cry."

"I am not crying."

"Not at the moment, perhaps."

Apologetically she said, "I am fond of Veda. After you, she is my nearest living relative, my own sister's child. And she is in great trouble; dreadful trouble. You must not laugh or scoff, it is really serious. She sent for me this morning. I have only just got back."

"It was not only a baby, it was an heir, wasn't it? Is that the trouble?"

"They have been married over five years ——"

"Seems a *non sequitur*, but get along."

"It was their first baby."

"I understand — dilatory. Didn't we go to the christening, by the way? Why, of course we did. Cheer up, old woman. It might have lived to be as interesting as its father, our dear cousin, Sir Audley. There seems to me something providential that another potential Audley Seddon-Battye should be snuffed out. It had red hair, too. What a memory I have!"

"Keightley!"

"I'm listening!"

Now she spoke hesitatingly. "That hobby of yours ——"

"Devenish says it is little better than spying. He has rather put me off. Shall I ring for tea? I'll read to you afterwards; I'm not going to let you fret because a three-months'-old Seddon-Battye has been translated. Poor old mater! I'm an unsympathetic brute, aren't I? I've done that villanelle I told you about, only roughed it in, of course. . . ."

"David Devenish said it was like spying?"

"What? Oh! my hobby, yes. I asked him if he thought it would be more appropriate for me to play golf."

"Keightley, listen. I don't know what to do. It isn't only that the baby is dead. Of course, that is very sad; they had waited a long time. But it isn't that; the way of his death is so dreadful. Nobody quite knows how it came about. I am afraid, we are all afraid, there will have to be an inquest." The tone of the last sentence was tragic.

"An inquest?"

"Yes. Unless you can help."

"I?"

"I told Veda I would speak to you, that you knew Dr. Ince."

"Ince?"

"Yes."

"But I don't. I know of him, I don't know him. But go on. What is the idea or suggestion?"

She had succeeded at least in interesting him. His eyes were bright with question.

"It's all so incredible, so impossible." She put her handkerchief to her eyes again.

"Here, mater, that won't do. I can't stand that. The baby has died, and they don't know of what it died. That is what you are trying to tell me. Didn't they call in consultants?"

"There was not time. At eleven o'clock in the morning baby was quite well, asleep. Nurse went down into the hall to get the perambulator ready. The under-nurse had had toothache and had been sent to the dentist. Nurse was not out of the room half an hour. When she came back"—Mrs. Wilbur's voice dropped—"the baby was *dead*! He had been suffocated. . . ."

"The pillows, bedclothes?"

"His dear little face was clear of them all."

Keightley would not let her cry, he put a consoling hand on her shoulder. "Buck up, mater. Tell me some more. How about the nurse?"

"Trustworthy, reliable."

"Who had been in the nursery?"

"Veda, perhaps Audley. No one else. Veda cannot bear the thought of an inquest. Can't you see Dr. Ince and persuade him to give a certificate?"

He is under an obligation to you. You never said anything of what you found out from that dreadful Dr. Boyne."

"I say, mater, you haven't given me away, have you? You haven't told Veda?"

"No, nobody."

"That's all right. I haven't taken up the 'failure of coroners' inquests to establish the cause of death,' in the interest of public morality, or anything like that. Only as a study and to strengthen my psychology. I rather like the idea of interviewing Ince," he went on, a gleam of amusement playing about the thin mobility of his lips. "Seriously now, what is behind this affair? Is anyone suspected? Who is the next heir? Is it a penny novelette story? Tell me all you know."

The entrance of tea interrupted. She poured out for him and was glad the hot cakes were well buttered. She would even have listened to the villanelle, but that he waived the suggestion nobly.

"The villanelle can wait. I suppose Veda is in an awful state."

"She has had several attacks of faintness, heart failure. She was in bed when I left her. She does nothing but cry."

"And Audley?"

"I didn't see him."

"He wasn't sitting with her?"

"No." She hesitated.

"Go ahead."

"Keightley, I—I think there is something wrong between them."

"What sort of wrong? Has she found out what an ineffable prig he is?"

"Audley is a man of the strongest rectitude, the highest moral character."

"I know. A dull dog all the same! But I thought they were devoted to each other."

"They were. But something has come between them. Keightley, you have taken up crime as a hobby, become interested in it. What do you make of this? You were right that I have been crying. I feel very distressed and useless. Veda tried to tell me something. I wouldn't listen, I wouldn't hear. She thinks, she suspects—it is such an awful thing to say——"

"Why, you are quite pale, I believe you are frightened."

"I can't help it, I *am* frightened. She says the last person to go into the nursery was her husband!"

"But he was prouder than anyone on earth has ever been before at having a son, an heir. He gave it sixteen names, I know, because they cost two shillings each to emblazon on that bowl we bought."

"Keightley, be absolutely serious for a moment.

I can't say it, you must try and understand without words. If — if he got it into his head that the child was — was not his ——”

“ Good God! But Veda is as straight as a die! ”

“ Yes, I know; of course she is, and as proud, or prouder than he. But in some way, you know, she is a little like you. . . . ”

“ No one is like me. ”

“ I mean she says things she does not mean, light, witty things. He has never quite understood her. In her agony of mind, this morning, she told me she had chaffed him once or twice because the boy had red hair, and no Seddon-Battye had ever been red! He was offended, estranged. For a week they have hardly spoken. They have quarrelled before, of course. It is his way, it appears, on these occasions, to shut himself up from her, not to speak until she has made the first step to a reconciliation. But now it has got into her head, she is almost out of her mind with fear that he took her chaff seriously, that he thought the baby was really not his ——”

She could not go on.

“ Finish. ”

“ He *was* the last person in the room, ” she said brokenly.

Keightley stood up and stretched himself. He actually forgot to be epigrammatic or paradoxical. He was following the mind of Sir Audley Seddon-Battye, who he had sometimes called “ the last of

the Aristocrats." Audley had an immense pride of birth, pride of place; to him the Seddon-Battyes represented not only England, but Scotland and Wales. He was a prig and ridiculous, but as sensitive to honour as he, Keightley Wilbur, to a false quantity.

When Keightley got as far as that and saw what it would be to such a man to think of a putative heir being foisted on the family tree, a child that was not his own, bearing his name, he took a large piece of crumpet, soaked in butter, and said, nonchalantly:

"I suppose I shall have to straighten this up."

"I promised Veda."

"Are you going back to her?"

"I said I would after I had seen you."

"I'll drive you there and then go on and see Ince."

"You don't think he will have done anything about the inquest yet?"

"You are as bad as John Jerman."

But he was lightly tender to her, and set himself to keep up her spirits as they drove to Eaton Square. Whilst he had waited for her to dress he telephoned to Clarges Street for an appointment, and heard that Dr. Ince could see him at five o'clock.

When he left her at the door, he said:

"I shan't be with Ince long, mater. I'll fetch you in less than an hour. I may want to see Audley. Don't lose your courage, nor let Veda. Audley wears ready-made ties, but it would be too far-

fetched to let him be hanged on that account. What bad psychologists you all are! Audley would never commit a murder, the thought of the funeral expenses would keep him from it! What I have to do is to shut Ince's mouth while I find out who did kill the little beggar. What a good thing it is, after all, that I have taken up crime, whatever Devenish may say about it. Tell Veda not to fret. I'll pull her through."

Keightley received a good impression of Dr. Ince — Bob Ince, as his friends called him — before he was ushered into the consulting-room. The rehabilitated house in Clarges Street showed no trace of the recent fire, but every evidence of a refined and cultured taste. It was an old house; Keightley had an idea, which he afterwards confirmed, that it was the one to which Lady Hamilton had removed after the death of Sir William, that it was here she had entertained Nelson. The walls of hall and staircase were panelled, and the panels were all fitted with contemporary prints, many of Emma herself, in bistre and colours. The dining-room in which he waited had walls varnished a dull yellow, and were hung with glass prints or paintings; the Chippendale sideboard and supports were laden with Staffordshire figures, cottages and Toby mugs; there were some fine pewter pots and old cut glass in corner cupboards. The current literature lay on an



old gate table. There were four ribbon-pattern Chippendale chairs, and the others, although they did not match, were equally rare and distinctive. Keightley almost forgot the object of his visit whilst surveying his surroundings.

The consulting-room, also panelled and painted white, was hung with a collection of Nanteuils, in rare condition. Keightley got a general impression of reticulated bookcases, many books and more china. Then he found himself shaking hands with a tall and handsome man, about forty years of age, with a deep and pleasant voice, dark blue eyes and assured manner.

"And what can I do for Mr. Keightley Wilbur?" the doctor began, and added a flattering word as to the pleasure he had in meeting one of whom he had heard so much. Keightley asked from whom he had heard of him. It was not modesty, only curiosity. Dr. Ince said, "From everybody," adding that he had read "The Nut's Progress," and all of Keightley's work, and was eager for more.

"But I must not talk about your work. You have come to consult me about your health?"

"No," Keightley answered lightly. "No. I'm very fit, very fit indeed."

"You did not want to see about your health?"

"Not at the moment."

Dr. Ince waited.

"Well, sit down, anyway," he said.

"You are not in a hurry?"

"When you telephoned I put off an appointment. I have half an hour."

"I shan't keep you as long as that. Do you happen to know that Lady Seddon-Battye is a cousin of mine, almost a sister? We were brought up practically together."

"I'm very sorry ——"

"Sorry?"

"About the affair, the baby's death. After waiting all these years, too. There must be an inquiry, of course."

"That's just what there must not be."

Bob Ince looked serious.

"I wish it could be avoided. I've already given notice to the coroner."

"You'll have to withdraw it."

Dr. Ince laughed.

"You can't withdraw a notice to a coroner unless you substitute for it an information before a magistrate, and I don't think you can, even then."

"Isn't the cause of death clear?"

"As clear as it possibly can be without a post-mortem. The baby was smothered. Someone put a pillow or cushion over its face, held it there until breathing ceased. It is not difficult to suffocate an infant of three months."

"Couldn't it have become entangled, tied up as it

were in its own bedclothes or pillows, without strength to extricate itself?"

"Committed *felo de se*? Quite impossible in this case. I saw it seven minutes after the nurse's screams aroused the household, and it was lying on its back, clear of all obstruction. It had been dead about a quarter of an hour, *rigor mortis* had not yet set in. I've not had time to make a complete examination. I'm going back there."

"You must find a way to avoid an inquest, any public inquiry."

"I have told you it is impossible."

"Nothing is impossible. You'll have to discover a natural cause. Convulsion, clot on the brain? You must devise something."

Dr. Ince became a little irritable and impatient with Keightley's persistence.

"You don't expect me to make a false statement?" he asked.

"That is just what I do," Keightley answered imperturbably. "Why not? You are not going to pretend to me that it would be the first time?"

"Sir!"

"Well, are you?"

Dr. Ince rang the hand-bell on his desk. The servant appeared.

"The door," said Dr. Ince.

"One moment, please," interposed Keightley; the servant stood irresolute.

Dr. Ince kept up the appearance of courtesy.

"Do you want a cab, or have you your motor here?" he said to Keightley.

"He might see if my motor is there, I told the chauffeur to wait."

The man withdrew. Dr. Ince had no desire to quarrel, his temper was naturally generous, and his personal dignity as yet unchallenged.

"That was a very insulting thing you said."

"I know. It was a preliminary to one more insulting still." Keightley had risen. Both men were now standing. "I'll make it as short and straightforward as I can. *There must be no inquest on my cousin's child.* I will myself make all the necessary investigations." Dr. Ince opened his mouth to speak, but Keightley gave him no opportunity. "It may be news to you that I have been doing detective work for some time now." Then he paused dramatically, but Dr. Ince made no further sign. "Mysterious deaths and the verdicts of coroners' juries have absorbed me to the exclusion of everything else. *I have not been taken in by a finding of 'Death by misadventure.'*"

He brought this out more dramatically still, watching the effect of his words. Bob Ince was looking at him as if he had suddenly become a patient. He sat down again, drawing forward a writing-pad and poising his pencil as if he were about to take notes.

"No," he said; "no? You have not been taken in by a finding of . . . What is the fellow driving at? Probably a case of acute egotism," he reflected.

Keightley was a little nettled at the other's calm. He let fly his bombshell prematurely:

"I have been puzzled, but not deceived, when poisoning by picric acid in conjunction with lanoline has been mistaken by twelve jurymen and two consultants for duodenal ulcer!"

Dr. Ince reddened and then paled; he swung round on the writing-chair and faced the speaker. For a moment he remained silent, the room became filled with silence.

Then Keightley said softly, gently:

"You *will* find some way to avoid the necessity of an inquest on my cousin's baby?"

But he did not know his man. Ince was stronger than he expected to find him, bigger altogether.

"So Leonard has been talking," Ince said then, in that deep melodious voice of his.

"Need we continue the discussion?" Wilbur answered, still gently. "There will be no inquest? I may tell my cousin that?"

"Blackmail, in fact?"

"Curious. That is just what I said to myself."

The doctor became thoughtful, he seemed to have a moment's hesitation, or weakening, and Keightley took immediate advantage of it.

"You will oblige me in this little matter?"

"If you are not out of the house in one minute I shall throw you out." Ince rose from his chair; his decision had been quickly made. "You are a young blackguard."

Keightley rose too. "You exaggerate, my dear fellow. . . ." The doctor advanced threateningly. Keightley matched himself in a glance with the other man. The doctor was at least two inches taller, a stone or so heavier. Keightley was rather pleased with the situation, although he knew he had failed. "I will take you on if you really mean it; I have always been fond of wrestling. But it wouldn't be to the point, would it? 'Brawl in a West End Surgery. Amateur Detective Gets Tripped Up!' There is nothing in it for either of us."

"Damn you!" But the doctor could see the justice of his words, the truth of them.

"And, of course, if I can't blackmail you, I can't. This is my first attempt, and I could hardly expect it to be successful. I have had no practice. It was a good scheme, but it has not come off. I suppose I didn't give it sufficient thought. It seemed so easy. I suppose you're not to be bribed either?" he asked contemplatively.

Ince tried to get hold of him, but Keightley fainted; he was really an expert wrestler, and also knew ju-jitsu.

"Don't rush your work, keep cool. I'm not really even annoyed. In fact, I believe we shall become quite good friends. Milly said she was sure I would like you."

Bob Ince's arms dropped to his sides.

Keightley could be the most charming fellow in the world when he chose, and he chose now. Dr. Ince yielded to him gradually, but he did yield. He was a many-sided man, not belligerent, much more intelligent than the average medico. They spoke of Milly Mordaunt, and incidentally of other mutual stage acquaintances, ricochetting to the subject-matter of the interview abruptly. Naturally it had remained in both their minds. When they came back to it they had advanced in knowledge of each other, and Keightley made something of an apology. "I suppose I started on the wrong tack. You would avoid an inquest, if possible?"

"Of course I would have done all I could, but an inquest is inevitable, whatever the result."

"You know what my cousin — what Lady Seddon-Battye has in her mind?"

"She is very hysterical; not really recovered from her lying-in. She is not fully accountable for anything she may say."

"All the more reason . . ."

"One cannot hush up a thing like this." Now Dr. Ince was even sympathetic. "The household, the tradespeople — everybody knows what she said

in her hysteria; that the child has been suffocated. It would be risking everything to gain nothing. I'll do my best. I'll do all I can. I am really more distressed about it than I can say. I brought the little fellow into the world."

"Well, you can leave it to me to find who helped him out of it." Keightley took up his hat. "Not Audley, for a million. I'm not only a criminologist, my friend, I'm a psychologist. You think that, notwithstanding Lady Seddon-Battye is hysterical, there is some truth in what she said in her hysteria? Sir Audley was the last person in the nursery; and so you suspect him! You, she, my mother, all of you! Will you wager? I'm never wrong. I bet he had nothing whatever to do with it — less than nothing. Will you bet? And that I shall find out who it was."

"Good luck to you. No, I won't bet. That the baby died from suffocation, that someone put a pillow over its face and kept it there, is not open to argument."

"Coolest fellow I ever met," Keightley said to himself when he was in the motor. "I like him, though. Wonder whether it was all a mistake? Boyne was blundering fool enough for anything. I'm no good as a blackmailer. I shall have to take lessons."

In Eaton Square the blinds were down and every-



one trod softly. Keightley asked for his mother and was told she was with her ladyship, that Sir Audley was still in the library, and would see no one. Mrs. Wilbur appeared at the top of the stairs while Keightley was talking to the butler, and he went up to her, two steps at a time.

"No! I can't say I've exactly succeeded," he replied to a hurriedly whispered question. "I expect there will have to be some sort of an inquiry. I want to see Veda. Can I go in?"

"I am not sure if she will see anybody — even you. I'll go and ask her. Is Dr. Ince coming over again? I am sure she ought to have a sleeping draught. Someone must sit up with her to-night."

Now Keightley was in the darkened room. Veda was lying on the bed. She had gone from one fainting fit to another; the atmosphere was heavy with complicated restoratives. Keightley had many of the little human failings at which it was his habit to scoff, family affection amongst them. He was fond of Veda; they were as intimate as brother and sister, more intimate than many brothers and sisters. She had helped his mother to spoil him, hero-worshipping him throughout her younger years. Her marriage had somewhat separated them; the Seddon-Battye estates were in the North of England and the two men temperamentally antagonistic. But nothing ever really separates two young people

who have been associated in a long and happy childhood.

"Poor old girl!"

"Oh, Keightley, I can't bear it!"

But Keightley's presence quieted her, made her more reasonable, less hysterical.

"You've got to remember you'd only known him such a short time."

"But he was my baby — my first baby."

"You *must* go on crying, I suppose?"

She raised her flushed and disfigured face, all blurred with weeping, from the pillow.

"Keightley, you've heard ——"

"What a rotten idea you've got in your head! Yes. And I think you must have gone mad to imagine such a thing. Audley! of all people."

"Someone held a pillow over his little face." Her own went down again.

"Does Audley know what you have been thinking about him?" Keightley said again after a short pause.

"I called him a coward. We hadn't spoken before that for three weeks."

The words were muffled by the bedclothes.

"Well, it must have been something of an unequal fight, you were right there."

"Don't laugh at me, Keightley — don't laugh. I know I am half out of my mind. I'm so miserable and . . . and wicked."

"Nonsense."

Now she was looking at him again, and indeed it was not necessary for her to tell him how unhappy she was.

"I've said such things — such awful things to him just to see how he would take them, just for fun. Now this punishment has come upon me. *I let him think it was not his.*"

Her young grief-ravaged face made him turn away, but he only said lightly, a little unsteadily:

"There wasn't any other fellow, I suppose?"

At that she burst out hysterically crying again.

"I've never looked at anyone else, you know I never have. I only tried to make him lighter, not be so solemn. I was so happy, and I never thought he would be offended, would believe ——" Again she abandoned herself to her grief, forgetting even that her cousin was there. "Oh, Audley, Audley!" she sobbed.

"Shall I fetch him?"

"I want him; I don't care if he did it or not."

"Of course he didn't do it. Don't be so idiotic."

She hardly knew what she was saying.

"I said it couldn't be a real Seddon-Battye because it had red hair."

"Pity it wasn't blue, he might have suspected Circe."

Keightley still spoke lightly, but he was genuinely

moved, and incredulous. Veda's mass of black hair was all he could see of her, and the heaving bedclothes.

Circe was the great blue Persian cat, a prize-winner, and before baby came Veda's great interest in life — Circe and her perennial kittens. She was lying even now at the foot of the bed. Keightley rubbed her fur up the wrong way, and she rose to her feet, hunched her back and spat at him.

"I'll fetch Audley. Don't make him more of a scene than you can help."

"He won't come, I know he won't come. He'll never speak to me again. He doesn't care for me any more. . . ."

The library door was closed. Sir Audley had given orders he was not to be disturbed. Keightley went in without knocking; there was nothing to be gained by subjecting himself to a refusal.

The unexpected happened. Sir Audley Seddon-Batty, a blond and slow-witted man of huge proportions, was sitting forlornly in an easy-chair; but he got up when his cousin entered. He actually seemed glad to see him.

"It was kind of you to come."

Sir Audley never read anything but racing calendars, Debrett's Peerage and Burke's "Landed Gentry." He was forty odd years of age, a little deaf, and although enormously rich was very care-

ful of his expenditure. His wife had a Rolls-Royce car for her exclusive use, but he had been known almost to cry when he spoke of the amount of petrol it used. He and his wife's family had nothing in common. But he was so shaken by the event of the morning, following upon the estrangement from his wife, that he welcomed even Keightley as an interruption to his thoughts. They talked platitudes for a few moments. Keightley strove for simplicity in expressing his sympathy. Audley was at his dearest before an epigram. Keightley said it was "hard lines" and "rotten luck." Audley said "Poor little chap!" and there were tears in his blue eyes. The idea that he was the murderer of the child he was lamenting became always more grotesque.

"Have you seen Veda?"

"Just come out of her room. Which reminds me. She wants you to go up to her."

Sir Audley got red. Actually there was a flush on his forehead.

"Me! Are you sure? I'll go."

"Wait a minute."

But he had already gone.

"Poor devil! I don't suppose he even heard what she said to him, or if he did, he never gave it a thought. He has no idea he is a suspected murderer! What fools women are! He has been sitting here longing to see her, longing for reconciliation. He didn't even wait to hear what I had

to tell him. The moment he thought she wanted him, had asked for him, he was off. And she's in love with the ass, and leads him the deuce of a life. Gad! Why can't I be like other people, and care like that?"

And then he lounged about the bookless room and thought of himself. But recollected in time that he had a rôle to play, and was not playing it.

"Now, who did kill the little beggar?" he pondered. "It wasn't Audley, that's sure. Nor Ince. Nor *Ince*? Once a murderer, always a murderer. No, that's rot! But what motive, what motive could anyone have had? And," he pondered, "if there was *no* motive . . . By God! I've got it. What a genius I am! Why don't I say 'Eureka'? Does anyone ever say 'Eureka'?"

He was suddenly excited at an idea that had come to him, and tried to calm himself with phrases. He rang the bell, and, too impatient to wait until it was answered, was out in the hall.

"I say, one of you fellows"—it was the sort of household where never less than two people answered the bell, however dilatorily—"where's the nursery? Can't you take me up there? I want to see—can't I see the—the——"

"The corpse, sir?" suggested the footman with heavy solemnity.

"Yes, that's it."

The footman led the way. All the household

had been up already. Such are the easy pleasures of the servants' hall.

The nursery was full of the scent of flowers, lilies and orchids, gardenias and tuberoses. The blinds were down. The swinging cot, white painted and hung with muslin and lace, was nothing but a mound of flowers in the gloom. Keightley dismissed his guide:

"Thank you. Get out now. I want to be alone."

Keightley stood beside the cot. The little waxen figure lay stiff and unreal amid the lilies — one had been put in the tiny hand. Then Keightley Wilbur did a strange thing, an unaccountable thing. He locked the door, turned on all the electric light, came back and took up his former position.

Ten minutes later, or perhaps less, he was downstairs; his eyes shining like stars.

"Where's the telephone?"

"There's one in the library, sir."

"Get me on to Dr. Ince."

"He's in the house, sir."

"In the house?"

"In her ladyship's room."

"You must get him out."

"Me, sir?"

"I'll go up myself."

Sir Audley met him on the landing; he had only that moment left his wife's room.

"I want to speak to Ince."

"He is with Veda. Is it important?"

"Vital. I can't wait."

"She is better, I think she is decidedly better."

Certainly Audley was; the forlorn aspect of unbearable trouble had left him.

"I am returning to her." Keightley could see the pride he had in saying it. "She cannot bear to be alone; she wants me to stay with her. Thank you, my dear Keightley, for fetching me. Had I known ——"

"I say, there isn't a moment to lose, do get Ince."

"Your dear mother not unwell, I hope?"

"She is decidedly better," Dr. Ince began, exactly as Sir Audley had done.

"I don't care a damn," was Keightley's quick reply. "Oh! I don't mean that. But I want to talk to you. I want you to come upstairs with me at once."

Dr. Ince marvelled at his excitement.

"None of you have got any sense; if you only had my *flair* for this sort of thing . . ." was how Keightley Wilbur began when he and Dr. Ince were alone.

That evening at dinner even his mother failed to recognise her genius, her developed and brilliant



son. He was in the wildest spirits, emitting cries like an Indian warrior or a cowboy, was excessively voluble and exhausting; for although he talked all the time he said nothing. By the time dinner was over he had silenced all speech in her; in another half-hour he had paralysed thought. He had been subject to these moods as a boy. Not a word of sense could she get from him, nor an answer to a question.

"I gather there is to be no inquest?" she ventured when he came up to her in the drawing-room. For answer he executed a war dance and terrified her for the safety of her furniture. Then sat down to the piano and played ragtime, leaving off suddenly and swinging round on the music-stool.

"No inquest! Rather! I should think there would be an inquest. It's the whole point. I've sworn Ince to secrecy. I'm not going to tell even you."

"Veda?"

"Veda is all right. Audley might have committed every crime in the calendar, but she won't have anyone else near her. He is going to sit up with her to-night. I left him fussing about hot-water bottles and sal volatile, comparing Boots' prices with the local chemist."

"Then?"

"It won't do, mater. I am going to keep it a secret. You won't get anything out of me."

"You seem quite pleased your cousin has lost her baby."

"Even that won't do it. I'm going out. You'll pump me if I don't. And I want my field day, my drama, my surprise ——"

His mother went to bed and took bromide, whilst Keightley distinguished himself by visiting every night club in London, making himself more conspicuous at one than another, narrowly escaping conflict with the police, telling everyone he had had the day of his life.

The next morning he had a splitting headache and remained in bed. He distressed his mother by excluding her from his room, and startled her later by sending for Dr. Ince. They were closeted together for nearly an hour. But Dr. Ince was able to bring her the reassuring news that her son was recovering from a bad attack of *migraine* and that there was not the slightest cause for uneasiness. True enough, Keightley reappeared at dinner practically normal.

"Poor old mater! I hope you haven't been worrying about me. What it is to have a genius for a son!" was the note of his conversation at dinner. Afterwards he read her the villanelle. She knew better than to mention the Seddon-Battyes, but praised his poem unreservedly and discussed it for three solid hours. As they were going to bed he said casually:

"By the way, darling, I want you to come with me to the inquest to-morrow. It's at Westminster."

The idea was repellent to her and she remonstrated. But without any effect.

"Be ready at eleven o'clock. I'll drive you round. Don't stop awake and think how trying it will be. Veda won't be there, she won't be wanted."

"You won't tell me what has happened, or what is going to happen?"

"Not a word."

At Westminster the next morning in a crowded court an inquiry was opened into the cause of the death of the infant child of Sir Audley and Lady Seddon-Battye.

The nurse was the first witness called.

"My name is Sarah Evans. I took the baby from the month. Her ladyship had a good character with me from the Duchess of Narrowly, the young duchess. I had all her three children. I should have been there now if she hadn't taken a French young woman into the nursery."

Recalled to the matter in hand, and kept to it strictly, she deposed that the under-nurse had been awake all night with toothache, and that after she had done the nurseries and got baby's bath ready "my lady" insisted on sending her to a dentist. Her ladyship remained in the nursery and herself

assisted at baby's toilet. There was then the necessity for cleaning the pram, airing the rug, and getting ready a hot-water bottle against the "little precious" went for his outing. Nurse was careful to explain she was not used to do such things, but "obliged" on this occasion. The litany of domestic service seldom varies.

Asked about the time, she was quite certain it was not more than eleven o'clock when she left the nursery. It was eleven-thirty-five when she returned. Then followed the account of how she went over to the cot — the dead baby, her screams, the housemaid coming to her, her ladyship, and after her Sir Audley.

"White as death milady went. 'It's you has done it. *Coward!*' she says, and falls fainting on the floor."

The sensation in court was profound.

It was then elicited from various members of the household that relations had been strained between Sir Audley and her ladyship for some few days. Sir Audley had had his meals in the library, her ladyship kept a great deal to her own apartments.

At this juncture the coroner asked if Sir Audley Seddon-Battye was represented by a solicitor. The question was repeated to Sir Audley by an inspector, and he shook his head.

"No. Certainly not. Why?"

Presently, at the invitation of the coroner, he

left his seat and went into the box. Kissing the book and undertaking to give his evidence faithfully, he detailed his name, various titles and seats with careful exactitude. When he had finished the coroner consulted for a moment with his clerk, and then said:

"Sir Audley Seddon-Battye, you have been in court the whole time of this inquiry, you have heard from the child's nurse the words spoken by your wife when she was unexpectedly confronted by you at the bedside of your dead child. Have you any comment to make, any explanation to offer the court? You are not bound to answer."

Sir Audley asked for the question to be repeated.

Mrs. Wilbur, not in a general way a woman to show emotion, put a hand on her son's knee. Keightley covered it with his own.

"It's all right, mater. I'm stage managing this show; wait a bit. There's a surprise coming."

Perhaps the calmest man in court was Sir Audley himself.

"Were you in the nursery between the time the nurse left it and the moment when her piercing shriek alarmed all the household?"

"Yes."

All faces were turned to the witness-box at this answer, necks were craned, and people stood up in their places.

"Do you wish to say anything more?" The coroner then gave him the usual warning.

It seemed as if Sir Audley did so wish, and he half opened his mouth as if to speak. But then he remembered his dignity and that this person who was questioning him was possibly not in the blue book.

"I have nothing further to say."

"That will do, then. You may go."

Sir Audley left the box as if a long array of ancestors were behind him and he was leading them.

The coroner leaned forward and said a few words to his officer.

"Idiot!" commented Keightley to his mother. "He has told the man not to lose sight of him!"

Dr. Ince was the next witness called.

"Now watch," said Keightley excitedly. "See him practise the art of *suppressio veri*. I coached him myself. He mustn't fail me."

Keightley's excitement was manifest, culminating.

"After Ince it will be my turn. Watch, mater; watch, listen!"

Dr. Ince, duly sworn, proved comparatively uninteresting. He said, in answer to questions, that he had attended Lady Seddon-Battye in her confinement three months ago, and believed she had fully recovered her strength. Her mind had never been clouded. The baby was healthy, weighed

seven pounds when he was born and increased steadily, although with fluctuations. He then went on to tell what had led him to his diagnosis that the child had been suffocated, and explained how every other cause of death was excluded by this or the other circumstance. He said further that he saw no necessity for a post-mortem, the cause of death being absolutely clear. He waited, and might perhaps have said more, but the coroner told him, as he had Sir Audley:

“You may go.”

There was a short pause after Dr. Ince left the box. The pressmen were curiously awaiting developments, the jury were confused and uneasy, the coroner uncertain what to do. Sir Audley's manner had undoubtedly impressed him, and the relation of his titles and estates. Yet why had his wife accused him, made that amazing statement? Of course the case must be adjourned for further evidence. But from whom was it to come?

At this juncture in his thoughts he became aware of a gentleman standing up in the body of the court and addressing him.

“Am I entitled to speak?”

“Who are you?”

“My name is Keightley Wilbur.”

“What do you know about this case?”

“Everything.”

“Do you wish to give evidence?”

"I am willing to give evidence."

Keightley went into the box and permitted himself to be sworn. The questions began.

"What is your profession?"

"I am a criminologist."

The coroner said in an irritated way that Mr. Wilbur might describe himself more particularly. Was he a detective?

Keightley replied pleasantly that he had thought his name was well known. The coroner answered rudely that he at least had never heard it. Keightley, looking at the reporters' table, shrugged his shoulders and answered:

"I suppose I must not resent that. I recall that there was once a judge who had never heard of Connie Gilchrist."

"Will you please tell us what you know of this case," the coroner then said impatiently. "Or if you know anything."

He did not think any important evidence would be forthcoming from this quarter. There were always cranks in coroners' courts; and he thought this was one of them.

"The child was smothered."

"So we have been told by Dr. Ince."

"He has not told you by whom?"

"He was not questioned upon that point. That may be a matter for another court. You are not



going to tell us that you know who suffocated this child?" the coroner asked sharply.

"Why not?"

Another sensation in court and Keightley obviously exhilarated.

"You know that you will be bound over to repeat your evidence at another time, in another place. You know that?"

"You are threatening me?"

"I am explaining your position."

Keightley turned as if to leave the box.

"Well, since I am not compelled to speak ——"

Flat disappointment, shown on every face, quivered throughout the expectant court.

"Come back, sir." The coroner raised his voice. "Answer the questions put to you." He spoke with great severity. "Remember there is such a thing as committal for contempt."

"I *am* obliged to answer, then?"

"You are obliged to answer, since you have told us that you know. Was it a member of the household?"

"A member of the household. Well, yes and no."

"Be more explicit, please."

Mrs. Wilbur found her heart palpitating violently.

But Dr. Ince was by her side and reassured her.

"Who is he going to accuse? What is he going to say?"

"You mustn't worry, he is enjoying himself in his own strange way. There will be nothing to distress you."

"Go on, please," said the coroner.

"You insist?" asked Keightley.

"I insist."

Keightley looked round the court and at the reporters.

"The responsibility is not mine, then," he said seriously.

"We shall judge of your responsibility when you have made your statement. You are keeping the court waiting."

"Very well. You will have only yourself to blame if ——"

Every face was turned to him in hushed expectancy; tense. He addressed, not the coroner, but the whole court, the small public and the constables, the reporters and loutish twelve in the jury box.

"I will tell you who suffocated this baby, who committed this murder! This murder," he spoke with contempt and sarcastic coolness, "of which you, sir, dared to suspect my cousin, Sir Audley Seddon-Battye."

The coroner said warmly that he had suspected

no one. But it was obvious the accusation annoyed him.

"Now I will reconstruct the scene, as they do in France." He stopped. Everyone's eyes were upon him, following his every phrase and gesture, intent, strung up to the last pitch of excitement. "Listen. Sir Audley Seddon-Battye went up to the nursery, as he himself has told you, whilst the nurse was cleaning the perambulator in the hall. He went over to the cot, stood admiringly by the sleeping child a little while, and then went out again. Lady Seddon-Battye was the next visitor." Again the very breath of the court was hushed. "She is not well enough to appear before you, but I made a point of seeing her this morning, before the court opened, and she said ——"

"What Lady Seddon-Battye said to you is not evidence," the coroner interposed.

"Not evidence? You don't wish me to go on then?"

"You can go on," the coroner answered sullenly.

"But if it is not evidence?"

"Go on, sir."

"She told me that she remembers now, she remembers perfectly now that her husband left the room as she entered it. She saw the child alive later than he did, took the bottle from his mouth . . ."

He paused; the silence was tense. Dr. Ince asked the lady in front of him for the loan of her smelling salts. Mrs. Wilbur was very white, and he thought she would faint.

"Lady Seddon-Battye, then, was the last person to see the child alive?"

"My God! in another moment your suspicions will be directed towards Lady Seddon-Battye."

The coroner could not find words.

The reporters were now writing rapidly, the jury staring open-mouthed.

"Lady Seddon-Battye had gone into the nursery softly so as not to awaken the baby, almost stealthily."

"You know this? How can you know this?"

It was Keightley's turn to be annoyed now, he wanted his effect, his climax.

"Oblige me by not interrupting. I shall make no statement that I am not in a position to prove. She took the bottle from the wet lips of the sleeping child, kissed him, withdrew. *But she had been followed. . .*" It seemed for the moment as if he could not go on.

"Soft-footed, more soft-footed even than she, surreptitious, the intruder came through the door that had been inadvertently left ajar. There she waited, crouching, concealed, until Veda — until my cousin went out again. Then, without pause or

delay, one spring, and her helpless and wretched victim . . .”

A woman shrieked. The coroner said sharply he would have the court cleared. Keightley himself seemed to have turned pale.

“And the name of this dastardly criminal, the name?”

There was sympathy with the witness. Who would he accuse? Keightley recovered himself, apparently with an effort.

“What dastardly criminal?” he asked the coroner, he seemed perplexed at the question, surprised.

“You said ‘she.’ It was a woman then?”

“A woman! God forbid! Surely I have made myself clear. It was Circe, my cousin’s favourite Persian cat.”

The woman who had shrieked began to giggle hysterically.

“Circe it was who jumped upon the cot, settled herself upon the baby’s face, jumping off again when nurse startled her by opening the door in the noisy way peculiar to servants.”

In the pause that followed Keightley permitted himself to relax, to lounge.

“There is evidence of this extraordinary story?”

“Surely it is not nearly as extraordinary as the one you credited,” Keightley retorted with an affectation of being weary of such stupidity. “Not

nearly as extraordinary as if my cousin had killed her baby, or Sir Audley his heir."

"You can step down."

"Thank you so much."

Dr. Ince, recalled, deposed to finding several of the cat's hairs in the cradle. And although, unlike Keightley, he was careful not to throw any blame upon the coroner, he pointed out that he had not been asked any questions as to how the child's death had been compassed; the cause of death, but not how it had been brought about. The coroner censured him, nevertheless, and said the court had been befooled. There was quite a little argument before the verdict of "Death by misadventure" was brought in. Ince defended himself with ability. He said it was not his place to volunteer evidence. The general impression remained that the coroner had been inept.

Keightley, going home afterwards with his mother, said:

"Mater, I ought to have been an actor. Didn't I tell the story well? I spoofed you, too, you know I did. Wasn't it a glorious anti-climax when I said 'My cousin's Persian cat.' How nearly that pompous beggar swore. Ince behaved well, didn't he? Never said a word until he was recalled. I don't believe anyone would have thought of it if I hadn't, if the idea had not come to me when I was in the library, after I'd sent Audley up to Veda. It came

to me quite suddenly. It struck me that if Circe was accustomed to jump on Veda's bed, why not on the baby's cot? So I went up, turned on all the lights, found three or four hairs, got hold of Ince, found some more. The great cat had jumped up, settled in the little beggar's face."

"Veda knows?"

"Oh, yes. I told them yesterday. Audley thought it was all cut and dried, never even knew what the coroner was driving at. Veda insists upon Circe being destroyed. You are not annoyed with me, are you? It was pretty smart of me, wasn't it?"

And she was such a good mother, such a devoted and loving mother, that although she was sick at heart, and shocked, she never uttered a word of criticism or blame, never told him what she really thought of the way he had treated their family trouble or tragedy. She praised him for his prescience, praised the dramatic way with which he had brought out his evidence, agreed he would have become a great actor had that been the career he had selected; gave him the admiration he claimed from her.

But David Devenish was less reticent when Keightley made his boast.

"What about spying now? If it had not been for my gift of insight, my skill as a criminologist,

Sir Audley might have found himself in the dock. My Heaven! What an exhibition he would have given us! Family pride, and then the horrid fear of excessive counsels' fees."

"The differences between your cousin and her husband would not have been in everyone's mouth; his temper or her humours."

"Ince had missed everything."

"You gave him no time. You were so anxious to mountebank at the inquest, to have your dramatic moment, to be in the public eye, that you considered no one's feelings. You say there is always a story behind a verdict. Shall I tell you the real story behind this verdict? It is a three-volume one, and the end is not yet. It is the story of Keightley Wilbur's vanity."

"The mater thought I carried the thing through splendidly.

*"If the managers only thought as mother does,"* David quoted contemptuously. "And as for being an actor, you played tragedy as if it were comedy, or farce. I don't believe you even remembered that it *was* tragedy, you were so occupied in thinking of yourself, in posing for publicity. Don't you think it is time you gave up this child's play of being 'Sherlock Holmes' and settled down again? You have obviously little or no qualification for the game. Go back to your writing. For that, at least, you have some small ability."



## CHAPTER VI

### THE AFFAIR OF HARRY MAINGAYE

KEIGHTLEY WILBUR seems to have been influenced by David's contempt of his detective powers, for soon he was spending four hours a day at his desk and talking about a "masterpiece." Within six weeks he had finished that now widely-known comedy, *According to Cocker*, and was spending all his afternoons and many of his evenings in rehearsing it. For be it known that when a Keightley Wilbur completes a play he has not the same difficulty as lesser men in placing it. The name counted, of course, but beyond the name was the salient fact that there was no pecuniary risk. Our leading American impresario fathered the production. The Fin de Siècle Theatre and a really fine caste was secured. Harry Maingaye, handsomest and most popular of actors, was engaged for the leading part.

Harry Maingaye, when he first burst upon the metropolis, had been known as "The Schoolgirl's Dream." The phrase had gone out of fashion, but not the man. His photographs were sold by the hundred thousand, and his fascinations were as fre-

quently the topic of conversation among the ladies of Brixton and Clapham as the terminological inexactitudes of prominent politicians among their fathers and brothers.

On the first night of the production of the new play Keightley's mother and Lady Seddon-Battye occupied the stage box, with Sir Audley ponderously between them. Keightley dodged behind, sometimes surveying the house and sometimes the stage. He was greatly occupied in pretending to be quite uninterested in what was going on, and said more than once that it was a matter of indifference to him whether the critics or the public liked the play or not. *He* knew it was the best comedy London had seen since *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and that was sufficient for him.

"What does it matter what they say? No one else could have written it," he told his cousin when she wondered audibly what this or the other person would say or think of the play, of which she had already had a synopsis.

When the curtain drew up, Mrs. Wilbur, to whom every line was familiar, listened with beating heart, was on the watch for smile or applause, alternating hope with fear, almost ill with excitement. Veda was sympathetic and jumpy; Sir Audley very pleased to note that the Duchess of Oxmundham had the opposite box to their own, and that there were people in the stalls of almost his own social status.

Members of the Cabinet were present, and a knighted actor with an exquisitely overdressed wife. A lame peeress brought an American hanger-on, and a well-known publisher a better-known beauty. There were a few obscure-looking people who had really done things, and many, more prominent ones, who were of no consequence whatever. Keightley Wilbur was always sure of a distinguished first night. The dramatic critics omitted to yawn and explain how bored they were at having to sit through a play, and the representatives of the box offices were present in force.

The first act went like fireworks, and the second was still more coruscating. Success was in the air, and it was admitted on all sides that the brilliancy of the dialogue was only exceeded by the novelty of the situations. Congratulatory smiles were directed towards the box where Keightley dodged behind the curtain, and where his mother sat well forward, exultant and happy.

"Isn't it going well?" she said, not once, but many times, as friends from before and behind came in with their congratulations.

Keightley, characteristically inconsistent, at the end of the second act became suddenly bored by all this unanimity, and went outside for a cigarette. Then the idea struck him to go and stand in the dress circle, survey the house from there, and listen to comments that he was not meant to overhear.

The experiment was only fairly satisfactory. The back row of the dress circle cared nothing for brilliant dialogue, and their own ran something like this:

"Isn't she too sweet?"

"I love that dress with the paniers."

"But the hat!"

"I think the hat should have been larger."

"I never saw Harry Maingaye look handsomer."

"You know you are in love with him."

"Silly."

"You've got his photograph on the mantelpiece in your bedroom."

Keightley moved away, but found himself little better off at the next resting-place.

"Did you cry?"

"I don't think so."

"You know you did; your eyelids are red now. As for me, I simply howled. There's no actor on the stage like Harry Maingaye. I don't care what he plays. I'd come to see him even if it were in Shakespeare. And he's just as wonderful off the stage. I know a girl who has a friend who met him."

"What do you think of the play? I wonder what is going to happen in the third act? I hope it won't be very long; we are going on to supper at the Carlton."

"I can't think of the play or of anything but

Harry Maingaye. I wonder whether he's really in love with Sylvia Hooper? I went hot and cold when they talked of giving each other up. I wonder what I should have felt if it had been me?"

"The play's rather Bernard Shawish, isn't it? I often didn't know what people were laughing at. I don't care for that sort of clever talk, do you?"

Keightley Wilbur, a little irritated, the reaction, perhaps, from that overdone insouciance he had exhibited in the box, found the wait between the second and the last act unduly prolonged. The house seemed to think so too, was becoming fidgety; he saw someone yawn.

A depression fell upon him, quite sudden and incomprehensible. When he told the story afterwards he always added that it was psychic.

"What the deuce is happening? Is there anything wrong? What could have gone wrong?"

He left the dress circle. A curious silence came over him when he got outside, as if he had become deaf, the whole house seemed hushed or muffled.

*Fire!* Could it be fire? What made him think of that? He tried to smell smoke, but there was no smoke, only the inexplicable delay and the sudden psychic depression.

He bungled when he sought for the door that would lead him to the wings. He wanted now to get behind, to find out what was happening, or whether there was anything happening. But he

was in the wrong passage. There were fire buckets, and "Emergency Exit" was written up in white painted letters. No one was about, and it was not an emergency exit for which he was looking. Now he heard the sound of many voices, many roused and excited voices in the street, and the door, the emergency exit door, opened suddenly.

"You hear!" a hoarse voice said. He found himself gazing into light eyes; agonised, horror-stricken eyes in a young, pale face. "They are calling out 'Murder!'" the voice stammered.

The next moment the emergency exit had closed behind Keightley, and he was in the street. Already a small crowd had gathered. It was not fire. What had the boy said? What was the word that ran from lip to lip?

"*Murder!* 'E's been murdered, they can't go on."

"Where are the police?"

"I heard the shot myself."

"'E ain't dead, surely he ain't dead?"

"Have they got the man?"

Now Keightley was at the stage door, a moment more and he was inside.

"What's the matter?"

Half a dozen voices answered — grief-stricken voices, voices giving explanations, asking instructions.

"Maingaye was shot as he left his dressing-room,

killed on the spot. The man who killed him got away. Nobody saw him. My God! isn't it awful?"

Keightley felt a little overwhelmed and faint, the faces and the voices became indistinct. Something was lying on the ground. Ince — surely it was Dr. Ince who was kneeling by it — got up.

"It's all over; there is nothing to be done for him. Poor fellow!" he said. Then he caught sight of Keightley. "You here, Wilbur? I told them to send for you. You know what has happened?"

A woman on her knees beside the body was crying hysterically and sobbing, calling on the dead man's name. "Harry, Harry, darling; speak to me, only speak to me. . . ."

"His wife ought to be sent for," one said indignantly.

Dr. Ince saw the pallor of Keightley's face, and that he was struggling for composure or comprehension. He took him by the arm and began speaking at once.

"This has been a shock for you. It's a dreadful business. Maingaye had hardly left the stage. Nobody seems to know exactly what happened. A shot was heard; Dacre found him lying as we just saw him. The bullet went right through the heart; no one saw who fired it. You can't recollect when poor Terriss was assassinated, can you? It was something in the same way, only Terriss was

stabbed, not shot. That was by a madman, so must this have been. I daresay the police have the man by now. They were sent for at once. You must try and pull yourself together."

Keightley had to pretend he was not startled nor unduly shocked. Ince talked to give him time to recover himself, but presently proffered a flask, which proved more successful.

The orchestra was still playing, the sound of it came to them where they stood. But the house was getting impatient, cat-calling and stamping its feet. The whole effect of the successful two acts was lost already. Keightley could not forget nor ignore that.

"I'd better go and tell them."

"If you feel equal to it."

"It hasn't affected me at all. What is an actor more or less?"

Bob Ince understood he was trying to be true to his conception of himself.

"As you say."

"I am thinking only of my beautiful play."

"Of course. Naturally. I quite understand your feeling."

"I suppose there really is nothing to be done?"

"Nothing. Death was practically instantaneous."

"Ghastly — isn't it?"

"The police are here in force, and the divisional



surgeon. Take another pull at the flask; it can't do you any harm. You saw Inez de Brissac? I must try and get her away. We don't want a scandal; they've sent for his wife."

"How about the mater? Can you go up to her for a minute? She musn't be startled."

"Yes; I'll see her."

The stage manager came up, and in a few hurried words it was decided Keightley should speak to the impatient house.

"Give them their choice. Ask if we shall go on with an understudy. Isn't it awful? I hope they've got the man."

"Was it a man?" Keightley said, almost mechanically. "I thought it was a boy." He hardly knew what he was saying.

"Isn't it cursed luck? We were in for a real good thing."

"I don't suppose it matters."

The stage manager gazed at Keightley curiously; he didn't seem to be quite himself. But he made way for him. Keightley was white-faced, but making an effort for his cloak of indifference, for his pose of being unlike other people, and not horrified by this tragedy. He even lit a cigarette; his hands were shaking, but he explained that by saying it was "so damned windy in these cursed flies."

The curtain going up discovered him with the cigarette and the pose, but without the words that

the occasion demanded. The faces of the audience were white blobs and he could not distinguish his mother at all; the box seemed empty. He wanted to thank the house for the attention they had given his play, to say something characteristic that would be in the papers the next morning. But the words would not come. There was applause, stamping of feet, cat-calls. Someone called out, "Why don't you finish; where's the last act?" and there was laughter. Now the house was plainer to him. He saw that many people in the stalls had risen, the women being hurriedly cloaked; the news had somehow penetrated.

"Spit it out, man, can't you?" came ribaldry from the gallery.

But he couldn't. For the first and only time in his life Keightley Wilbur was speechless. He opened his mouth, but nothing came through. His play ruined, spoiled, unfinished; he was sure it was only the spoliation of his play that paralysed his speech.

The stage manager in the wings understood the situation better, and came to his assistance.

"Get off," he whispered. "Leave it to me."

The stage manager was fluent, and found no difficulty in expressing himself.

"Mr. Wilbur, the talented author of the brilliant play we were in course of presenting to you, came before you to make an announcement. But his

emotion has proved too much for him. He will have your sympathy. Ladies and gentlemen"—there was a dramatic break in his own voice and a pause—"I have a dreadful thing to tell you. As Mr. Harry Maingaye left the stage after the last act, he was shot by an unknown assassin."

Now there was a desperate strained attention, a silence that was like fog, then sobs, like a storm breaking.

"The doctors are with him now. We are not without hope." The stage manager knew Harry Maingaye was dead, but he put that in. "As you may imagine, behind the scenes the shock has been very great. Miss Hooper is in the deepest distress, quite unable to resume her part. The tragedy has struck us all. But we are the servants of the public. I am speaking on the part of all the performers. Mr. Wilbur would have spoken, but, as you saw, he was unable. Shall we go on with understudies, or will you give us leave to drop the curtain, to indulge our grief?" His voice broke.

"Pull down the bally curtain!"

The house emptied slowly; there were sobs, questions, a growing, dreadful excitement. Nothing like this had ever been known in the annals of the English stage. Harry Maingaye shot! Assassinated! But such things don't happen in England—it was incredible! Weeping women filled the hall; men's faces were white and shocked.

The newspapers the next day had big headlines and columns of conjecture. A full account of the tragedy was given, and great bewilderment expressed as to how the assassin could have escaped. The police were blamed, and the Conservative papers wrote about the "fostering of class hatred" and "Limehouse." There were lists of the parts Harry Maingaye had played, descriptions of his methods, reprints of interviews with him in his country home, reprints of photographs of "Harry Maingaye and his two little daughters," "Harry Maingaye gardening," "In his library," "In his motor." Comtesse Inez de Brissac was not mentioned; the English Press, whatever its shortcomings, knows how to be silent when the relations of man and woman are in question.

Mrs. Harry Maingaye, on the other hand, who was well known under her *nom de théâtre* of Susanne O'Neill, was interviewed, but had little or nothing to say. She expressed her horror of the assassin, and did not know where the police could have been to let him escape them. She said, "Harry has not an enemy in the world as far as I know." No interviewer could get any more from her. After the first day she refused to see any more reporters, and the little over-photographed house in Halliford was found to be guarded by policemen, inaccessible.

Three days later, at St. Martin's Town Hall, Charing Cross, Mr. John Salmon, the Westminster coroner, opened an inquest on the body of Mr. Henry Lepel Mings, better known as Harry Maingaye, the popular actor who was fatally shot outside the private entrance to the Fin de Siècle Theatre in Maiden Lane, on the 17th inst. Mr. White watched the case on behalf of the lessee of the theatre; Mr. Keats for the Maingaye family.

The jury having viewed the body, which lay in the mortuary adjacent to St. Martin's Church, Susanne O'Neill, otherwise Mings, or Maingaye, was called, and stated she had identified the body as that of her late husband, Henry Lepel Mings. Witness said she last saw him to speak to about three months ago. She knew nothing of his death except what had been told her. She never knew him to be threatened. She did not know that he had an enemy in the world.

A juror asked how it was that she had not seen her husband for so long a time. She replied, somewhat hesitatingly, that she had been touring in the country. Mr. Keats rose and asked the coroner whether it was necessary that family matters should be gone into. Until he spoke, the jury, and apparently the public, had known nothing of any family matters in Harry Maingaye's life that required suppressing.

The coroner said dryly that they had better call the next witness.

Mr. Stanley Dacre, who had played the title rôle in *According to Cocker*, deposed that he was in Mr. Maingaye's dressing-room when Harry came off the stage at the end of the second act. He appeared in the best of spirits, and they talked a little about the play and its reception. A note was brought in, and after Harry had glanced at it he said: "Oh, damn the woman!" But quite pleasantly, not as if he were annoyed. He then got up, saying "I'll be back in a minute," and went out.

The witness continued:

"A moment later I heard what I now know was a shot, but then I thought it was a tyre burst. I went outside and saw Harry lying in the passage."

His emotion overcame him and he was unable to go on.

"You were the last person who saw him alive?"

"I would have given twenty lives to have saved his," the witness exclaimed passionately.

The letter that had been mentioned was called for, but could not be produced. Police-constable Fear was called, and gave evidence that there was no letter on the body when it was taken to the mortuary. Other evidence was called confirming this.

Sub-divisional Inspector Brush said he was called to the Fin de Siècle Theatre, and found the

body of Mr. Maingaye lying in the passage. He remained with the body until it was removed. He saw no letter. All the officials of the theatre were there. Scene shifters, carpenters, ladies and gentlemen from the stage were passing in and out all the time. He had no authority to keep them out. One lady knelt by the body for quite a long time.

Annie Stairs, an attendant and programme seller in the front of the house, said a lady in the stalls had given her a pencilled note to take round to Mr. Maingaye. Asked if she knew who this lady was, she said she thought it was the Comtesse de Brissac; someone had told her so. There was no answer asked for to the note.

The court was full to overflowing, and everyone strained forward and tried to get a glimpse of the next witness. By now the wildest rumours were flying about.

Inez de Brissac was cloaked in sables and wore two large pearls in her ears. She was no longer in her first youth, but still beautiful, with red hair and soft dark eyes. She said she was an American, married to the Comte Louis de Brissac, but since divorced from him. She seemed to have no reluctance in admitting this.

"You knew the deceased well?"

"I loved the very ground he walked upon." She burst into tears and wiped them away freely with a scented and coroneted handkerchief. "I

know what they are saying about me, but I wouldn't have hurt a hair of his head. The note was to tell him how splendid he was, and that everybody around was saying so, and to say that I would see him later."

"When?"

"I didn't say when."

"You then left your seat?"

"I went into the *foyer* to wait for an answer. I was just longing to see him."

"You knew the way to Mr. Maingaye's dressing-room?"

"Yes."

"But you didn't go there?"

"I stayed around thinking he would come to me."

She gave her evidence with extraordinary simplicity, crying most of the time, but obviously concealing nothing.

"You were on intimate terms with Mr. Maingaye?"

"We were as husband and wife."

When Inez de Brissac said that she and Harry Maingaye had been as husband and wife, the dead man's widow, she who had been Susanne O'Neill, rose passionately in her place. But a lady with her pulled her down, put an arm about her, spoke to her soothingly.

In examination and re-examination, after several



adjournments and with some Press assistance, part of the story came out. It appeared that Mr. and Mrs. Harry Maingaye had lived upon affectionate terms until he and the Comtesse de Brissac met at a supper party given by Sir Herbert Seaborne, about six months ago. Afterwards Harry Maingaye visited at her flat. At first the visits were supposed to be on business. The Comtesse was engaged on dramatising one of her salacious novels, in which there was a part she thought would suit Mr. Maingaye. The Comtesse was admittedly a woman of very strong attraction. Harry Maingaye was weak, susceptible to flattery. When his wife and her friends found out what was going on they did all they knew to stop it; but without effect. A temporary separation was agreed upon. It was hoped it would only be temporary; negotiations were opened with the Comtesse de Brissac. In the midst of them came this terrible news.

Mrs. Susanne O'Neill was recalled and very closely questioned about her movements on the night of the tragedy. She admitted now to having been in the house, in the pit, and said she had never missed one of Harry's first nights. To the question whether anyone had seen her there, she answered that she was dressed quietly, as she did not wish to be recognised. She had her pride. She said she saw the Comtesse in the stalls.

The coroner urged her to think of someone who

had seen her, but she averred that she had spoken to no one. All her friends were in the stalls or dress circle. She knew no one in the pit—that was why she had gone there. She left after she saw the Comtesse go out. She guessed whom she had gone to see.

"I couldn't bear it. I went home; it was late, and I feared that I might miss the last train. I heard nothing until the next day."

Further examined, she said that she had never had a revolver in her possession and did not know how to shoot. Her servant, Ann Coates, was sitting up, knew the hour she returned to Halliford, had made her a cup of chocolate, and helped her off with her things. Ann had been with her for many years.

The time that the last train to Halliford from London arrived was investigated, and proved to be as Mrs. Maingaye stated. Ann Coates confirmed as to the chocolate, and said her mistress was not at all agitated, but very depressed and unhappy. And then she said something indignantly about "women that was no better than they should be, and others whose shoes they were not fit to wipe."

The coroner stopped her, and again the reputable daily papers made no comment upon the incident. Ann Coates, however, enlarged upon her text materially the next day to a quick and sympathetic interviewer. This interviewer represented the *Starting Gate*, which not only printed the substance

of what she said in full, but in a leading article gave an account of the Comtesse de Brissac's career from the time when, nearly twenty years ago, she had left America with Comte Louis de Brissac, a well-known Belgian nobleman, until to-day.

It appeared from this leader that Comte Louis had married Inez B. Mott a few months before the birth of her son, and that his family had cut him off in consequence. Five years later he divorced her. With the utmost effrontery she immediately published a volume of love letters, under the title, "He and I and Summer," in which she retold the story related in the Belgian divorce court. She came to England with this book twelve years ago. The article went on:

"She offered it to publisher after publisher, until in the end she persuaded Messrs. Kirsch and Co. to undertake the job. Mr. William Kirsch, the society member of the well-known firm, if we may be allowed to say so, is admittedly not entirely adamant to female graces. The book was a *succès de scandale*. Others followed, and it would be idle to deny to the lady a certain ability in telling what, for the sake of euphemism, we will call a 'borderland story.' One of these stories ran through the columns of our valued contemporary, *Illustrated Panpipes*, one of the Herodsfoot publications. It is perhaps inadvisable to inquire how Lord Herodsfoot came by the MS. The Comtesse was in Monte

Carlo that year, and was *not*, we believe, on visiting terms with Lady Herodsfoot. But this by the way. Roger Macphail painted her and the picture was shown at the Goupil Gallery, where it excited considerable attention. Mr. Macphail will perhaps remember who gave him his commission? ”

The article went as far as it was possible to go without libel, or perhaps even further. But the *Starting Gate* had a reputation to keep up. The editor had been so often summoned, fined and committed, that the process had no terror for him. Suspicion as to the murder of Harry Maingaye was at this time directed towards Susanne O'Neill, and the article had the intention—in which it was successful—of arousing public sympathy on her behalf. According to the *Starting Gate*, she was a woman greatly wronged.

At the fifth and last adjournment of the coroner's inquiry Mr. Keightley Wilbur was called, not with the expectation that he could throw fresh light upon the affair, but merely as a matter of form.

In the witness-box Keightley Wilbur told the story of the first night of the play. He told of the applause and congratulations, then of his own reaction of feeling and visit to the dress circle. A certain amount of latitude was given to him, and the court heard of the delay after the second act, and Mr. Wilbur's intuition or psychic vision of

disaster, of how he left the dress circle and found himself near the emergency exit.

"Someone spoke to me, said: 'You hear — they are calling out "murder"!'"

The coroner asked at once:

"Who spoke to you? Someone you knew?"

"I don't think so — I'm not sure. Many people know me whom I do not know." This was the old familiar Keightley.

"The murder had not been committed two minutes. You were in an unused passage. Who had the right of entry there?"

This was new evidence, and there was something like a sensation in court.

"I don't know."

"But this is very important, very serious. The police were on the scene almost immediately; they surrounded the theatre; a crowd gathered outside very quickly. No one saw a man or woman running."

Keightley himself saw the inference, was startled that it had not occurred to him before.

"We will hear afterwards who had the right of access to this passage. You will tell us now what you remember of this boy or man who spoke to you. Was he panting, as if he had been running, agitated?"

"I have only a general impression."

"Give us your general impression."

"Let me think a minute. It had not occurred to me to connect the circumstances."

His friend David Devenish reminded him afterwards, and often, that, although he prided himself on his *flair* for crime and the criminal, on this, his first real opportunity, he had to admit how completely he had missed it. The time came when Devenish had not to remind him, when his self-reproaches were worse than any taunts or chaff. But that is another story.

Now, in the witness-box, on the last of the many-times-adjourned inquiry into the death of Harry Maingaye, Keightley Wilbur dropped all his affectations, they fell from him involuntarily. He was asked to assist the court, and he did so to the best of his ability. He remained silent for quite a minute after he had said that it had not occurred to him to connect the circumstance of the young man speaking to him under the fire buckets with the criminal who had shot Harry Maingaye. Then he went on:

"I can't remember definitely. I can only give my impression." He covered his eyes with his hand as if to remember better, to see into the past, and he spoke slowly: "A hoarse voice, unfamiliar. Light eyes, familiar, but not as I had known them, the horror changing their expression. . . ."

"Search your memory," the coroner said sol-

ernly. The court was as still as if it were the antechamber of death.

Keightley Wilbur still spoke as if he were sleep-walking; he was thinking backwards, trying to see through shadows.

"I don't know what makes me think it was a familiar face. Yet I am sure I have seen those curious light eyes before, and fair hair. . . ."

"The man wore no hat, then?"

"No."

"Evening dress, as if he were part of the audience?"

"I don't remember. Perhaps. I think a white shirt front, and an overcoat, loose, or cape. I have an impression, but no real memory."

"Would you know the man if you saw him again?"

"I might. I believe I have seen him before; I think I should."

"Had he anything in his hand?"

"I don't know."

"You would know if he had a revolver. That would have been sufficiently unusual to impress itself on you."

"I did not see a revolver, I am sure of that."

"You say the door opened. Did he — did the mysterious stranger open it?"

"One moment I saw the door, the 'Emergency

Exit' in white letters, the fire buckets, the next I was outside, racing for the stage door."

"Did he follow you?"

"I don't know. I don't think so. I had forgotten him. But now, looking back, I believe I recognised the *fear* in his eyes, that it was communicated to me, that that was why I ran."

Mr. Wilbur then related what he saw when he got to the stage door. But all that the court had heard already.

No questions, however skilful, and the coroner was a clever lawyer, could elicit anything further about the man who had met Keightley Wilbur at the emergency exit, whose eyes were familiar, but to whom he could put no name.

"You are quite sure it was a man, and not a woman in man's clothes?"

"Not absolutely sure."

"Think — a life is at stake."

"Don't press me. I have told you all of which I am sure. Anything else might be invented and not remembered. The eyes were familiar, that is all of which I am positive, but I have seen them differently."

He was then allowed to go.

When the coroner summed up the case to the jury, he said that Mr. Keightley Wilbur's evidence was very unsatisfactory, and had added to the difficulty of the case,



"He saw a face that he tells us was familiar, but he cannot put a name to it. He says he is not sure that if he saw the man again he would be able to identify him. He is not even prepared to swear that it was a man at all and not a woman in disguise. Neither he nor any of the witnesses we have called are aware that the murdered man had any avowed enemy, that he had been the subject of any threat, that any vendetta had been declared against him. Any suspicion that has been aroused in the long course of this inquiry has been suspicion only, lacking verification. It would be idle to deny, gentlemen, that a very painful story has been indicated, but fortunately it is not one which it is any part of your or my duty to investigate or upon which to comment. It is to be hoped that further investigation will reveal the truth and lead to the conviction of the criminal."

He then directed them to their verdict, which ran, as had been anticipated, "Wilful murder against some person or persons unknown."

A few days after the verdict had been arrived at, Keightley Wilbur sauntered into the Savoy grill-room as usual, and found Roger Macphail at the same table with David Devenish. David, as has been already related, rallied him on his evidence. Roger said:

"Well, at least Wilbur's theory is maintained. Here there is certainly a story behind the verdict."

"A very ugly one."

"We only know part of it," Keightley interposed a little eagerly.

"But for you we should probably at least know the assassin," David reminded him, somewhat cruelly.

"That is not the most important thing."

"Not! I should have thought it was."

"No. The most important thing is my position in the matter."

"You think that!"

"Steak and kidney pudding and a bottle of lager." Keightley had taken his seat at the table with them, and now gave his order to the waiter. Then he went on:

"Once you said that my investigation of crime was little better than acting as a spy in a friendly country, you talked of my vanity, and said I desired notoriety and not knowledge. It was you sent me back to my desk."

"You have obviously no qualification for detective work."

"You mean because I failed to recognise this man — detain him?"

"You never even thought of him as the assassin until the idea was presented to you in court."

"That has nothing to do with it. Idiot! I said lager, not whisky!" This was to the waiter. Keightley Wilbur was not himself to-day, or he

would not have spoken so rudely. "I believe the whole thing to be 'The Moving Finger Writes.' I believe — Why do you think it was to me the murderer was shown, that he came to me?"

"Because you were at the emergency exit, and he had to get back into the house somehow whilst the police were searching outside," David answered.

"You have neither faith nor imagination; I have both. I am going to clear the reputation of Susanne O'Neill."

"It was not Susanne, then?" David asked coolly.

"Can you tell us anything you didn't tell the court?" Roger wanted to know.

"I am suddenly convinced that it was the man who shot Harry Maingaye who spoke to me in the passage. But he was not an ordinary criminal. Quite a youngster, trembling all over, appalled at what he had done, sick with fright or remorse. It comes back to me bit by bit."

Roger was drawing on the tablecloth, one of his bad habits. He drew the head of a Medusa, hair standing snakily on end, staring, sightless eyes.

"Anything like that?" he asked Keightley.

"Not a bit. It was not a woman."

"What are you going to do?" Devenish asked with all the curiosity he could spare from kidneys and Yorkshire pudding.

"I am going on with the work that has been given me to do. You think, for instance, that there

is only one story in Inez de Brissac's life. You saw that article in the *Starting Gate*; even that was only half the truth."

"True," interposed Roger; "and the lesser half."

"She is Laïs, Messalina, Catherine of Russia — all the bad women in history and throughout the ages; a man-eater. Maingaye was the latest, but not the last. She wrecked his home, but how many more? The immediate question is to find from what wrecked home or hope came the shot that killed Harry Maingaye."

"And when you have found out, will you be responsible for his execution; that he shall hang by the neck until he is dead? There is no 'unwritten law' in our civilised England."

"I am not bound to give him up. But I am bound to find out. I owe it to myself. He killed the man, why didn't he kill the woman? I will do nothing else — I swear I will not — until I know the truth. I did not seek the task; it has been thrust upon me."

"You had far better write another play."

"I shall write many more plays. But I won't put pen to paper until I know not only the whole history of Inez de Brissac, but who killed Harry Maingaye."

"Don't make absurd vows."

"Well, perhaps it is impossible for me not to write. But I swear I will not publish nor produce

until those light eyes have materialised." Then he remembered the part he always played, and added, with a laugh: "You forget how my first night was spoilt."

"I bet you what you like you don't find out. The police may, but not you."

"I'll take that bet."

"You'd better have a time limit," suggested Roger.

"Why?"

"We can't spare your work indefinitely."

"It won't be long," Keightley answered confidently.

"Say a year."

"Very well, a year from to-day. Within a year from to-day I will produce the man I met in the passage."

"Or a poem founded on the incident," David Devenish jeered.

"You may chaff. But I hold you to your bet. Here are the terms: If I fail I give you and Roger a dinner at the Ritz, and you can jeer at me until the end of time. If I succeed you give me a column in the *Grail* to tell my story, and admit my justification in thinking I have a mission."

"That sounds fair."

"And a leader."

"Anything else? Perhaps you would like a complete edition of the paper," David said as he rose

to go. " But you shall have your leader. You can spread yourself if you've anything to spread about."

" Don't go, Roger. Stay whilst I drink my coffee. I want to talk to you."

And Roger stayed.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE INQUEST ON ARMAND LE MESURIER

AFTER Keightley Wilbur had made that vow neither to publish nor produce until he had discovered the murderer of Harry Maingaye, he wanted to hear all Roger Macphail could tell him about Inez de Brissac. That Inez de Brissac held the clue to the mystery Keightley had no doubt. And Roger was ready enough to talk.

"I have painted her twice. The first time was at Porto Fino, twelve or fourteen years ago; I painted their son also. It was the year before the divorce suit, but Inez B. Mott, of Chicago, was already showing through the skin of Madame la Comtesse de Brissac, and there were frequent ructions."

"You've met her since — here in London?"

"Oh, yes; London and elsewhere. The last time was at Beaulieu."

"Have I seen the portraits?"

"Count Louis lent both his to the New Gallery four or five years ago, and is sending them again, at my request, to the International next year. The other is now at the Goupil."

"To whom does that belong?"

"Lord Herodsfoot."

"There was something in that story then?"

"It is possible; anything is possible with Inez. She is a man-eater."

"She shall eat no more," Keightley said confidently. "She has me to reckon with now."

But the reckoning was apparently not yet. In the hubbub following the inquest on Harry Maingaye the Comtesse left England—or at least she left the fine flat she had occupied in Ashley Gardens, and even her publishers expressed themselves in ignorance of her whereabouts. She was supposed to have gone to Nairobi, then to Australia. But Keightley could ascertain nothing positive, and many months were wasted in inquiries.

Remarkably enough, she was not the only witness in the Maingaye case to disappear in the same way. Alleging the death of his friend as an excuse, and that the associations made the theatre unbearable to him, Stanley Dacre had thrown up his part in *According to Cocker* and vanished from the metropolis. His name was not to be found in any of the theatrical papers; he was neither seeking an engagement nor acting in the provinces. No one knew what had become of him.

Nine months elapsed out of the twelve that had been allotted to Keightley Wilbur in which to find the man who shot Harry Maingaye before anything



occurred to help him. He had kept his vow neither to publish nor produce; but he was straining at the leash, feeling the restriction, counting the weeks. He had written a complete history of woman, under the title, "Comparative Feminology," and a stirring ballad in the style of "How we Brought the Good News from Ghent," detailing how a soap boiler bought a baronetcy and informed his family.

Then, before the chain broke, a bone was flung him. It came in the form of a letter from Mr. William Kirsch, the publisher, whom the *Starting Gate* had alluded to as "not adamant to female graces":

"DEAR WILBUR,—I hear you are inquiring as to the whereabouts of the Comtesse de Brissac. She has just written to us about a book from No. 10 Warriner Gardens, Battersea. I can take you to call upon her if you like. Let me know.—Yours,  
"WILLIE KIRSCH."

There was a ribald postscript that need not be printed. Keightley answered it and the note appropriately; and named four-thirty on an early day. When the day came, Willie Kirsch put the appointment off by telephone. "My dear fellow, I'm up to my neck in work. I don't know which way to turn. But if you'd care for a letter of introduction——" And more ribaldry followed. Willie Kirsch was notorious for breaking appointments;

any chorus girl could lure him from the most serious of these. Keightley accepted the offer of a letter of introduction, and gave the assurance that his morality was not in jeopardy.

Keightley sent the letter on by hand, and called that very afternoon at Warriner Gardens. He was surprised to find how poorly the lady he sought was lodged. No. 10 was one of a block of flats, obviously converted from what had been small houses. There were apparently only three flats in each block. In the narrow hall of the one to which Keightley had been directed a board announced that the first floor was occupied by Mrs. Carrington Mott; the ground floor had either an anonymous or no tenant. A Mr. and Mrs. Mead were on top. There was no hall-porter or lift; it was not that kind of flat.

Keightley mounted the stairs, and knocked at the first door he came to. The Messalina, Laïs, or Catherine of Russia he had seen in the coroner's court in sables and pearls, whom he had pictured in palaces and marble halls, herself opened the door to him. Her red hair was bound round her head in plaits, her cheeks were rouged, and her lips painted; she had grown stout and looked some years older than when, nine months ago, she had appeared in the witness-box at the inquest on Harry Maingaye. She was obviously startled and surprised at seeing a stranger, and said quickly:

"I expected Mr. Kirsch."

Keightley took no chance of not being received. His foot was already inside when he answered:

"Oh, yes. I am his representative."

"Come in." She accepted without question the fact that he was a delegate from the firm, and led the way to a drawing-room, furnished in black and gold, with an overmantel and tapestry curtains, indistinctive. It was obvious a visitor had been expected; books were lying about, and a pile of MS. was on the table, also whisky and soda, and a box of cigarettes.

"I thought Mr. Kirsch would have come himself. Are you authorised to deal for him?"

"I don't think there will be any difficulty."

"I must have a large advance. I shouldn't have written to Mr. Kirsch if I had not been in need of money."

"We have been too long without a book from you," Keightley said pleasantly. He had forgotten she wrote, or what she wrote, but fell into his part quite easily. Inez at first thought he was a young partner or myrmidon of the firm. But Keightley's personality soon asserted itself, and she offered him refreshment, ceased lamenting the absence of Mr. Kirsch, and began to expatiate upon what she called her "plot."

"I think the book is bound to make a great sensation. There is a scene . . ."

But what our amateur detective had come to hear

was not the plot of the Comtesse de Brissac's new book. He said he was quite sure that Messrs. Kirsch would be delighted with such an original idea, and asked if she had a synopsis. He said again what a pity it was that she had been so long silent.

"Well, you see, after poor Harry's death ——" she began hesitatingly. And then paused, not being sure how much her visitor knew about her.

"Oh, yes; I remember now. You and Harry Maingaye were great friends. His death must have been a terrible shock for you, a great loss," Keightley said feelingly. "Not but what you must have many other friends, a woman of your extraordinary attractions."

He was a little uncertain of his ground, but was soon reassured. Her quick, coquettish exclamation: "Why! you don't say you find me attractive?" gave him the keynote, and he proved his Latin blood by the delicacy of his compliments, and the way, whilst admitting her charm, he led her to observe his own. They progressed far even that first afternoon.

Inez B. Mott, for it appeared she had dropped her title for the moment, had arrived at the age when the younger the man the more desirable seemed his attentions. Before Keightley left her he had been invited to come again, and had received a certain measure of her confidence. He brought

the conversation back to the popular actor, for instance, and said carelessly, as if he had half forgotten the circumstance:

"They never found out who killed him, did they?"

It was then he heard that, after the inquest on Harry Maingaye, Inez B. had found herself the object of threats and anonymous letters, her contributions to various papers had been returned, and she was made to feel there was a prejudice or cabal against her.

"I had been too candid, that was the fact. I ought to have denied everything; said I scarcely knew him."

"Perhaps that would have been better," he answered sympathetically.

"But it is my nature to be frank. Now, say, Mr. Wilbur, what sort of woman appeals most to you? The woman, like me, who, if she cares for a man cannot conceal her feelings, or those shy, furtive ones who play underground?"

Keightley, of course, said the women he liked best were those of her own candid and sanguine temperament. Whatever the one before him had been twenty years ago, when Comte Louis de Brissac had given her his title, her mode of life had coarsened her, and a practised man of the world like Keightley Wilbur soon saw that subtlety and delicacy were no longer necessary in dealing with her.

She told him, not perhaps this afternoon, but without any great delay, of the alteration in her circumstances since Harry Maingaye's death. He heard of straitened means, of jewellery that had been pledged or parted with; he was urged to use his influence with Messrs. Kirsch to get an advance of at least five hundred pounds on the novel. She knew by now that he was not one of the firm, but thought he might be the capitalist behind it. Women of her type always find it easy to believe what they wish. And her belief was, in a measure, justified. For Keightley rang up Willie Kirsch and desired that he should negotiate for the book.

"Never mind whether you publish it or not. That's a matter for yourselves. You can always make an excuse. But she is short of money, and I want you to send her something on account. Send her a hundred or two. I'll give you my cheque. Not regular business? Who said it was? But to oblige me——" Keightley Wilbur was accustomed to being obliged. He had always a *quid pro quo* to offer.

"My dear fellow!" Willie Kirsch called everyone "My dear fellow." And he raised every possible difficulty, yielding in the end, however, but not without a warning, in his characteristic note of loose raillery, against the perils of knight-errantry.

"You must be a little careful. You know she is a very dangerous woman. I don't want to tell you

my own experience with her, one must not kiss and tell, but ——” And he would have told, notwithstanding that one must not, only Keightley rang him off after he had secured his promise. The paunchy little publisher was not a favourite with him.

He took the news himself to Inez. She was to have a hundred pounds on the delivery of the MS., the rest on publication.

“Will a hundred see you through?” he asked.

“It is only that I want to get away from here.”

And then she told him that she was nervous and uneasy in this remote part of the world.

“I have an idea that I am being watched all the time, that I don’t go out or come in without someone knowing it.”

Keightley questioned her closely. What made her think she was being watched? Who did she think was watching her — why?

She did not know, she could not say; she cried a little hysterically and said she was sure she had never done anyone any harm. He was unable to get any more from her at the moment. She showed a tendency to continue her weeping on his shoulder, and, as he was not prepared to go as far as that, he left. But came back the next day, and the next, on one excuse or another, bent on his detective work.

He had been visiting her in this way for the better part of a week when he became aware that,

whether she was watched or not, *he* certainly was; a door creaked, there were footsteps on the stairs; once he caught a glimpse of a stealthy figure behind the closed blind of the ground-floor window. There was no doubt that when he came in and when he went out of No. 10 Warriner Gardens there was someone extraordinarily interested in his movements. Quite a curious feeling came over Keightley Wilbur when he had convinced himself of this, the hunter had become the hunted. He was exhilarated, confirmed in his purpose, all his curiosity aching.

"Has anyone the right to question your conduct, or check your visitors," he asked Inez. She said "No" with such vehemence that he suspected the answer should have been "Yes."

"Who has the ground-floor flat?" was his next question.

"It isn't occupied."

"Sure?"

"A Mr. Stanley did occupy it, but he has left." She was so obviously unwilling to tell him more that he insisted.

"Was he a friend of yours?"

"Never you mind what he was. He is nothing to me now."

"What about that frankness ——"

"I don't want you to think badly of me."



"How could I?"

This was the opening for an interlude of coquetry in which Keightley found it difficult to play his part. Either his coolness or her own emotions presently brought about an hysterical burst of confidence.

"He said I had had another man in the flat," she broke out suddenly, her handkerchief to her eyes. "Not a soul can come near me without his making scenes. I've been driven from pillar to post, he has made my life a perfect hell upon earth. I'm sick to death of dodging about and hiding. I have told him over and over again I am not going to stand it any longer. I am not ashamed of anything I have done; if he is — well, that is his affair."

"What did he say when you told him that?" Now Keightley was keenly interested.

"He said: 'Then it is all over between us.' He caught hold of my arm like a mad creature."

She pulled up her sleeve to show a large discoloured bruise.

"You have not seen him since?"

"He has never been near me, nor written."

But try all he might he could not get from her the name of the man who had treated her so unconscionably, who had occupied the ground-floor flat and then left it, the man with whom she admitted she had been on such friendly terms. He could

neither hear his name nor how long she had known him, whether it was before or after Harry Main-gaye's death.

"You think he has set a watch upon you?"

The baffling and unexpected answer was that before they quarrelled both of them had been conscious of espionage.

"I do believe he was always fearful of being shot at, like poor Harry."

"You are quite certain he is not still in the downstairs rooms?"

"They are empty; even the furniture has been taken away." She began to cry again.

Keightley asked if it were possible to get access to the rooms, and heard that the landlord would gladly let him have the keys. Mr. and Mrs. Mead used to have them and show the flat, but Mr. and Mrs. Mead were away.

"You are alone in the house, then?" he asked.

"Nearly always."

He smiled, and she did not resent it.

"So!"

"One can't be alone day and night," she said sullenly, but half-apologetically. Presently she suggested he should come oftener. To which he replied evasively.

Keightley Wilbur was extremely puzzled at the way in which the situation had developed. He satisfied himself of the truth of what Inez had told

him by sending a man to see over the ground-floor flat. It was unoccupied and unfurnished. A little further professional assistance confirmed him also in his belief that Inez was visited by someone besides himself. He wanted to know who it was, but more urgently who was the man with whom she had been practically in hiding since Harry Main-gaye was shot. Was it the assassin? He felt that he was on the threshold of discovery, as he knew he would be, once he had got in touch with Inez de Brissac. Nevertheless, the darkness before him was impenetrable, and although he was on the threshold the door was not open before him.

Now the fascination of the pursuit fastened upon him; he forgot his bet, his cherished work, everything. He could not keep away from Warriner Gardens, although he no longer paid visits to the Comtesse de Brissac. In the dusk of the winter evenings he made himself acquainted with all the approaches, the exits and entrances to what he instinctively felt would be the scene of a drama. He walked up and down Prince of Wales Terrace, and in and out the miserable pretence of a public garden. He got to know that part of Battersea by heart, the Suspension bridge and Albert and Battersea bridges, the park and adjacent river, the whole dreary surroundings.

Such patience and industry could not but be rewarded. One evening he became conscious of a

fellow prowler, one, not like himself, bent on exploring the neighbourhood, for at the moment he had convinced himself that was his own objective, but intent on staring at the windows or watching the door of No. 10. When Keightley Wilbur had convinced himself of this, he went softly and stealthily out of the gardens, and then, whistling and quickly as if it were a mere thoroughfare, he traversed the pavement; so quickly, indeed, that the other watcher had no time to get out of the way. Keightley brushed against him, almost rudely, but recollected his good manners in time, and stopped to apologise. Then he had a shock, a quick shock of surprised recognition.

“Good heavens! *Dacre!*”

The recognition was mutual. Stanley Dacre's first impulse was to deny his identity, to pull his hat over his eyes, to turn sullenly away. But Keightley was too friendly and quick for him.

“Who would have expected to see you here? We were all wondering what had become of you. It's good to see you again.”

“I've only just come back,” Dacre mumbled or stammered. It was obvious he had not wished to be recognised, but Keightley ignored that.

“Sorry I nearly knocked you down. The fact is, I'm in a devil of a hurry. I didn't hurt you, did I?”

It was no part of Keightley's hastily conceived

plan to make Stanley Dacre suspicious of his own presence here. He wanted time to collect his thoughts, and of course one is not a playwright or a poet without the story-telling faculty. He went on:

"I've been at the Chelsea Hospital, getting notes from one of the old soldiers. Another 'Waterloo.' By the way, there is a part in it would suit you. You're not doing anything just now, are you? You might give me your address. You're not staying about here by any chance?"

"Here! Oh, no!" And he gave an address in Maida Vale.

"So long, then. I'll see you again."

He went off, leaving Stanley Dacre without an idea the encounter had been anything but an accident, leaving him to continue his self-imposed task.

*"Stanley Dacre!"*

Keightley's breath had been taken away for the moment. He had stumbled over the threshold now. There was no darkness, but the light was blinding, disconcerting, amazing.

*"Stanley Dacre!"* He said it to himself over and over again as he got farther from Warriner Gardens. Why had he not thought of him before? The last man to see Harry Maingaye alive! Dacre's words in the witness box came back: *'I would have given twenty lives to save his.'* He had protested too much. Keightley did not think

so then, but he did now. He did not allow any of the difficulties and discrepancies of the case to interfere. He rushed at his conclusion without dwelling upon detail. He thought he saw it all. The men had been friends. The woman had come between them. And ever since Harry Maingaye had been murdered, Dacre and the woman he had loved, or who had loved him, had been skulking about together, afraid to be seen or recognised, afraid lest they should be suspected, afraid of themselves, each other, everything.

"Not that they would have been; not that anybody but I would have penetrated the situation. And now I suppose she has another lover. . . ."

Keightley's self-satisfaction inflated and floated him. He was so buoyant that he walked all the way home, thinking of how he would triumph over David Devenish, win his bet, spread himself over that column and leader. In justice to him, however, it must be admitted that he never thought of what his discovery might be going to mean to poor Stanley Dacre, or what would be the upshot.

Keightley had to talk, every man had a weakness, and that was admittedly his. Because David must not know until the last minute, and he could not talk to his mother of Inez B. Mott, Roger Macphail seemed marked out for his confidant. But he was unable to find Roger that evening, and

was compelled to keep his discovery to himself. The next day, however, was the private view of the International Exhibition in Grafton Street, and he already had an appointment to meet Roger there. Roger was on the committee of the society and Keightley found him in the hall, surrounded by people. But Keightley never thought that anyone's work or play was as important as his own.

"I say, Macphail; I must speak to you. I've got the most extraordinary thing to tell you. Get rid of all these people."

Roger moved back a step with him.

"I can't; not at the moment. We are being 'opened' at twelve by the Duke of Connaught; there are no end of things to arrange. We've only just heard. But don't go away; go inside, there is plenty to interest you. I'll come to you the first moment I am free. I suppose you've found the man with the light eyes, the man who shot Harry Maingaye?" Then someone came up, and in another moment Roger was again submerged.

But his words lingered. Keightley had for the moment completely forgotten all about the young man who had met him in the passage of the Fin de Siècle Theatre, and stammered that they were calling out "Murder." A horrid doubt came over him, black dark went that dazzling threshold again, and for the moment he wished he had never looked

at crime except in the columns of the papers, that if he wanted subjects for his stories, plays, or poems he had been satisfied to invent them.

"Curse it, I haven't got to the bottom of it yet."

Now the difficulties and discrepancies that had not occurred to him before buzzed obtrusively about him. Keightley believed in his instinct, and his instinct had told him unerringly that the young fellow with the light terrified eyes and the stammering tongue, the breathlessness of terror, had fired the shot.

And when he came as far as this — when he came as far as to admit that, although he had met Stanley Dacre staring at the windows of Inez's flat, it was not sufficient proof that he had murdered Harry Maingaye in order to enjoy her company, he found himself quite suddenly, and without any preparation at all, gazing again into those very eyes with which he had told the court at the coroner's inquest he was familiar — those strange light eyes.

"My God!" He brushed his hand over his own and looked again. There was no doubt, no doubt at all. From the wall, from their gilded frame, they gazed into his, and he stared back. The painting was a little thin and flat, but obviously by the hand of a master; it was a child's face, pale and fair, a full-length figure holding itself upright, eyes of the palest blue. Keightley, after he had stared



his fill, referred to the catalogue. But he knew, he knew already.

"ROGER MACPHAIL.

No. 7.—The Young Count."

The painting was in the artist's earlier manner; a little dry perhaps, but the pose superbly caught, the Goya-like perception of character compensating for anything the portrait lacked in richness of colour or voluptuousness of decoration. It was the materialisation of high lineage and young pride. "The Young Count" stood, erect and lonely, facing destiny.

"You know who it is?" Roger Macphail was beside him again, and speaking. "Not so bad, I think. Come and see his mother; she is on the other wall. I wish I could have got Herodsfoot to lend us his copy; in a way it is better, more devilry in it. But I think you'll like the brocaded dress — What's the matter?"

"Macphail!" Keightley Wilbur was pale, and Roger wondered at his emotion. "About that picture?"

"I painted it at Porto Fino. I thought I told you before. It is the son of Louis de Brissac, and Inez B. Mott."

"It is the portrait of the young man I met in the passage the night Harry Maingaye was murdered," Keightley said palely.

"What passage?"

"You haven't forgotten?"

"You don't mean — My God!"

"I couldn't make a mistake."

"Her son!"

They gazed at each other like two who saw ghosts. "You — you are quite sure? *Her son!*" he repeated.

"He would be eighteen or nineteen now."

"Was he in England at the time? I never heard that he was in England. Wilbur, don't say or think it — it's — it's impossible! Don't look like that; everyone will be staring at us. Pull yourself together. This is not what you came here to tell me. What did you come to tell me?"

Keightley answered dully, "I came to tell you Stanley Dacre shot Harry Maingaye, that he was intriguing with Inez at the time. But it isn't true; of course it isn't true."

The magnetism of the picture drew him. He looked again into the light, visionary eyes of a boy of high lineage, holding himself proudly, the son of Inez B. Mott.

"Stanley Dacre!" repeated Roger in a bewildered manner.

"I was right about having seen him before, about the face being familiar to me."

"You saw it in the New Gallery four or five years ago." And then Roger Macphail added, for

he too had imagination and saw to what the recognition was leading, "I wish to God I had never painted the damned thing."

They moved away from the picture. The time of the reception was growing near and the rooms were filling. Roger Macphail was in request, and acquaintances began to greet Keightley. It was impossible for the two men to speak privately together. But they pledged each other to secrecy without words. Now Keightley felt as David Devenish said he should, like a spy in a friendly country. The boy was a young gentleman or nobleman, with the pride of caste; Keightley understood and sympathised with him. But he had no time to think. Social duties claimed him. His mother was there with some folk from the country who wanted to be near the platform, to hear the Duke speak. Keightley found them chairs. Then he had to defend the French Impressionists, and afterwards to attack them, maintaining his pose.

"Is anything the matter with you?" his mother asked, as Roger had done.

He answered "Nothing!" and "Why?" but afterwards admitted to a headache, and said he thought he should go home. He wanted to be by himself, to think the thing out.

All that afternoon Keightley Wilbur sat in his study, trying to piece the puzzle, to find what place Stanley Dacre had in it, to decide what he must do.

He knew now that when Inez had told him she was watched she had probably been speaking the truth. She said Stanley, too, went in fear of his life. And now he, Keightley, thought that fear also might have a sound foundation.

When he got as far as that in his survey of the situation it was already dusk. Every evening at dusk for the last few days he had gone to Warriner Gardens, watched the watcher! Then his curiosity drew him, or, as Devenish would have said, his vanity. He wanted to prove his cleverness by discovering the mystery that had evaded the police, the mystery of the death of Harry Maingaye. But this afternoon, now, it was no longer curiosity nor vanity. It was conscience — an impelling sense of duty. All at once it became clear to him that neither Inez de Brissac nor Stanley Dacre knew who had killed Harry Maingaye, that each of them perhaps suspected the other, that only he, Keightley Wilbur, *knew*.

But what he would do with the knowledge he did not know. For that denied and hidden heart of his was ablaze with sympathy for and comprehension of the boy who had Inez B. Mott for mother. That very day he had sat through luncheon with his own; she had entertained guests at the Ritz — distinguished guests, but herself the most distinguished amongst them. Her talk came back to him — brilliant, vivid, gracious; a mother

of whom to be proud. This afternoon she had been in to see him twice; understood he was worried, but had not vexed him with questions; brought him his tea because she knew she was quieter than any butler, for he had often told her so, and disturbed him less; dropped a kiss on his hair as she went out. He was her whole heart, the pivot of her life. And he knew it, appreciated what such love and care meant in a man's life, for all he talked so lightly.

But if, instead of such a mother, he had woken one day in early manhood to the knowledge that he was the son of one who was loose and almost public, flaunting her looseness in salacious novels, admitting to lovers . . . ? Keightley Wilbur projected his own into the mind of the boy whom he had pledged himself to hound down.

To hound down, or to save from another crime? He hardly knew which alternative drove him back that evening to Warriner Gardens; he was never sure. Nor why he took the motor, except perhaps because it was standing before the door and Kito was on the box. His mother came out of the drawing-room when she heard his study door open.

"Will you be home to dinner?" she asked.

"I don't know. Don't go out."

He felt it was possible he might want someone to whom to talk. He hardly knew what spirit moved him.

"Of course not." She was uneasy, troubled

about him; he knew that when he drove off, and thought again about mothers and sons, and how fortunate he was in his own.

Kito was told to go to Chelsea. But in a very few minutes Keightley whistled through the tube and changed the direction to Battersea Park.

"Battersea Park!" The Japanese valet may have thought it a strange drive at this time of night. When he got on the bridge he looked about for a petticoat. But no one was in sight who by any possible association of ideas could be thought to have an assignation with his strange English master.

When he got to Battersea Bridge Keightley got out.

"I may be an hour, or more, or less. Wait for me."

Almost before the echo of the words had died away in the deserted street and Kito had realised his instructions, Keightley was in Prince of Wales Terrace, and in sight of Warriner Gardens. And there, running at top speed, as if for his life, he caught sight of someone getting over the garden wall. Instinctively he gave chase. The man, or boy, dropped from the wall. Keightley vaulted over it lightly, and was upon him before he had recovered himself. Now they both began to run again, madly. Keightley was handicapped by his overcoat, but he soon saw that he was gaining. The boy who was

running saw it too, and on Albert Bridge, midway, he stopped short. The lamplight flared into his face; his eyes were little less horror-stricken now than on the night Harry Maingaye was murdered. They were the same eyes, and it was the same hoarse voice:

"Why are you following me?"

"Why are you running away?"

The boy — he was little more, not really a man grown — pale and defiant, answered quickly:

"By what right do you question me?"

"No right at all." They stared at each other, two surprised and panting figures in the evening gloom.

"I have done nothing to you."

"Have you done anything to anybody? Am I too late?" Keightley hardly knew what he was saying. For he feared that he was indeed too late.

"You are Louis de Brissac."

Before the words were out of his mouth, before he had time to realise his folly, the boy, whose white face had gone grey, whipped out a revolver. Keightley made a rush to close with him; he was no coward, as has been said.

"Not for you — for me." A shot rang out. Keightley found himself holding a limp figure in his arms, heard a cough and a bubble of choking breath. There was not a soul in sight, not a sound save the reverberation of that shot ringing in his

ears. The revolver dropped from a powerless hand. Still holding the slight figure in his arms the amateur detective stood for a moment irresolute, then with his foot slid it to the bridge's edge, and over. He did not hear it reach the river, and there was no sound as it sank. The boy was growing heavier in his arms. Keightley, although not tall, was strong, and now braced his muscles, calling upon his brain too, which responded like a trained soldier.

"Grit your teeth and help me all you can. I'm going to carry you into safety. If we don't meet anybody there's a chance. For the name's sake make an effort. I'm your friend, not your accuser. Now!"

He hoped the words got through, but knew less well what to say than what to do. Chance helped them, or the murk of the winter evening. The feet dragged, the arms were supine, but by some miracle of speed or circumstance when he came in sight of the waiting motor at the corner of Battersea Bridge Road Keightley knew it was life and not death he held in his arms.

"Drive as quickly as you can," he said to Kito. "You can risk a fine." And then he added, more for his own satisfaction than Kito's: "My friend is worse than I thought."

The speed limit was exceeded, the empty grey roads unrolling before them, but luckily they were



not stopped. All the way from Battersea Bridge to Belgravia, and until they came to Carlton House Terrace, Keightley supported that inert body, listened to the cough and choking breath, felt now and again upon his hands the warm splatter of mucilaginous blood.

Kito climbed down from his box.

"Get the front door open, then come and help me to carry him in," Keightley said hurriedly.

It was near the dining hour, and no one was in the hall; a nervous housemaid fled before them when they got to the second floor. There was always a spare room ready, for Keightley often brought a friend home late at night. Kito and he laid the inert figure on the bed.

"Get his things off. Do what you can for him." In less time than seemed possible, Keightley, at the telephone beside the bed in his own room, was ringing up Dr. Ince.

"Come round at once, will you? A friend of mine has had an accident. What sort of accident? Oh! monkeying with a gun, shot himself. Don't say a word to anybody. I'll be on the lookout for you."

Later on, but not much later, Keightley Wilbur, in evening dress, was being served with soup in the panelled dining-room, and explaining to his mother that he might have to leave the table before the end of dinner because he had brought a pal home with

him who had met with an accident, and Ince was coming round to see him. Whatever surprise she may have felt she did not show, only persuaded him to take champagne, hoped the accident had not been a serious one, and offered her services.

"Kito is looking after him. I shall hear what Ince says; we may have to get in nurses."

Keightley had no idea what he was going to do, what was going to happen, why he had acted as he had. He forgot to wonder about Warriner Gardens, or what had taken place there. His brilliant and irregular mind, never like other people's, was now entirely occupied with the boy upstairs who had shot himself the moment he knew that he was recognised.

All that night Keightley Wilbur sat up in the spare room, Bob Ince with him, and the Japanese manservant came in and out. Ince made a very careful examination when he came in after dinner, but before he was through with it Keightley knew what he was going to be told. Death's seal, gradually, unmistakably, became stamped upon the boy's face. Towards dawn he seemed to rouse himself from stupor and endeavour to speak. Ince gave him a cordial. Keightley came to the side of the bed, and it was towards Keightley the dying eyes turned.

"Am I dying?"

It was Ince who answered:

"Is there anything you want to tell us?" Dr. Ince had had a hurried and disingenuous explanation from Keightley, and had not questioned it.

"Have I time?"

"Drink this — that's better! You can go on."

Dr. Ince found no sense in what he heard; it seemed like delirium, or the meaningless mutter of a dying man. But to Keightley it was all clear, cruelly clear.

"Everybody knew . . . she wrote it in a book. I heard it only last year, my first year as a cadet. 'And now she is living with an actor!' My own friend told me, François told me. I said, 'If it is true I will kill him — kill them both. But I could not kill my mother . . .'" He lay still, his breathing loud and difficult.

"*I could not kill my mother,*" came through again, more hoarsely.

Keightley, who talked in paradox and lived by epigram, felt a choke in his throat. Then the boy's eyes opened, and he went on again, through his difficult breath.

"She loved me when I was little, kissed me once when I lay in my cot. I could not kill her. But all our name was stained. Here I live under a different name, and watch and watch, not knowing what to do . . . there were always men. But this one, this — he struck her, bruised her arm. I could not let him do that. *Mother, don't you re-*

*member that night when you kissed me in my cot?"*

His mind was wandering; he was only semi-conscious, drifting out. Dr. Ince held him up, supported him in his arms; the death pangs were on him, and his breathing could be heard in the next room. The last time he opened his filmed and dying eyes they were fixed upon Keightley. They were dying eyes, and because of the agony of pleading in them they were awful to see.

"You called me by name. My poor, proud father! — he knows not what I do; he has other sons, they will, perhaps, be glad if I come back no more. So I die here. No one knows my name — no one but you. You will not tell?" His eyes pleaded, implored, and they were dying eyes. "*Keep my secret!*"

"Before God I will!" said Keightley Wilbur, and a minute later dropped on his knees beside the bed.

Ince laid his burden down gently.

"It is nearly over," he said. And all of them were silent until the boy's spirit passed — the young, bruised spirit, and the confused and wounded mind.

"It is all over," Ince said. He had looked upon death so often that for him it had lost its terror. But Keightley remained upon his knees.

"I'll look in the morning," the doctor said to Kito. "You had better get your master to bed now. This has been a trying scene for him."

But for himself he wanted the rest of the night for sleep. The morning would be time enough for writing a certificate, going through the crude formalities of concrete action. He had not heard how the accident had occurred, but he would hear in the morning.

Keightley got up from his knees presently.

"Shall I straighten him out, sir?" asked the servant.

Keightley felt cold, his teeth chattered, and he answered unsteadily:

"Do whatever is necessary."

He turned to go into his own room, but could not face the solitude. He found himself instead in his mother's room, talking incoherently. He had startled her out of her sleep, and at first she lay dazed and without initiative. Then all at once he flung himself on the bed beside her. Keightley so rarely cried, even when he was quite a small boy. Now she saw his shoulders heave, and put her arms about him, soothing him, trying to comfort him dumbly, not questioning him at all.

His breakdown only lasted a few minutes. Then Keightley got off the bed, and, with his back to her, mumbled that he had a confounded headache. She pretended to believe him, got up and put on her dressing-gown, fetched him an aspirin cachet, which he took with a whisky and soda that she brought at the same time.

"I haven't been able to sleep."

He was still in evening clothes, which made her aware of the possibility that he had not tried very hard.

"May I smoke in here? I believe a cigarette would do me all the good in the world."

"I'll have one with you."

Then he walked about the room, and found fault with her Japanese prints and the colour of the dressing-gown that hung at the foot of the bed.

"All the nice women I know wear pink and blue. This passionate purple—— I suppose you call it passionate purple?"

"Violet."

"Is neither one thing nor another. Why don't you get a proper kimono? I know where there is one——yellow. The real thing; suit you down to the ground. I say, it's nearly five o'clock." He pulled aside the blind. "Foggy, too! Shall I ring and get your fire lit? You don't want to go to sleep again, do you?"

"But you? If you have not been to bed——"

"Oh, curse sleep! I say, mater——"

Then he stopped short. He knew he would have to tell her, he didn't exactly know what, but, anyway that a boy lay dead in the spare room, and that, whatever crime or crimes he had committed, he had been so greatly sinned against that his memory was not to suffer from them.

He got out an inchoate explanation presently. All she realised at first was that death had been a visitor in the house during the night; even now was cold above her head, in the grey and pink of the luxurious spare room. Afterwards she waked slowly and confused to the story he was trying to tell her, but more quickly to his need of help. Motherwise, her spirit leaped to his, understood.

"I've got to hide it, keep his secret. I promised him — I swore it. Mater, nobody must ever know who he is."

"No, no. I see."

"I promised it to him."

"His identity ——"

"Must be lost." Keightley spoke feverishly.

"You will go to bed now."

"I can't — I can't rest, nor think."

"Trust me. You are not fit to think; you must let me think for you. Is that all? That his identity must be lost, that no one must ever know who it is lies dead upstairs? Very well. I have already an idea. It will all be quite easy. Keightley, I have never failed you, not in all your little school-boy troubles, and others. I shan't now. No one shall ever know. Don't look like that — so troubled and unhappy."

"He shot himself . . . through me."

"Take a hot bath. I'll bring you in some coffee presently. Empty your mind; look upon me as

taking your place; leave everything in my hands. Don't fret. I understand; I quite understand. Nobody *shall* ever know. . . ."

She went to him after he had had his bath, persuaded him to bed. Perhaps the aspirin helped. Before she went to her own room he was asleep.

It was nine o'clock when he woke. For the moment he had forgotten his trouble. But this happy oblivion was not for long. With the breakfast tray came the morning papers. He did not know why his hand shook as he opened them. Premonition may have come to him. There, on the middle page of the *Grail*, in large letters, he saw, with sudden sickness and conviction:

"ACTOR SHOT IN WARRINER GARDENS.

"CRIME IN A BATTERSEA FLAT.

"Mr. Stanley Dacre, the actor, aged fifty, was found shot last night at a flat in Warriner Gardens, Battersea ——"

When he had read as far as that Keightley put the paper down. His throat was dry and the coffee tasteless. He had blundered into a quagmire, and the mud of it choked him. He left his breakfast, got out of bed and put on a dressing-gown. He walked aimlessly about the room, then to the window. The portent of the day was dull, and his mind refused to act. Upstairs in the spare room lay the dead boy whose secret he had promised to



guard. But he had not known all the secret that it was. He lit a cigarette, but soon threw it away.

"Can I come in?" Mrs. Wilbur was more considerate to her son than he to her. "I thought you might be asleep," she said.

"Asleep! I'm not likely to sleep." He spoke irritably, but pulled a chair forward for her. Then he saw she was dressed in black, and commented upon it. "It doesn't add to a fellow's cheerfulness," he said. She looked him in the face, and answered, smiling a little, rather a wan humour at its best:

"I could not avoid going into mourning for my young cousin, could I?"

"Your young — cousin!"

"I have just been speaking to Dr. Ince. You will explain to him exactly how the accident occurred."

"*Accident!*" he repeated stupidly. But that was the last moment of his stupidity.

"I told him how you met Armand at the station, and brought him here; that he was showing you his revolver, boylike, when it went off ——"

"It went off!"

"Dr. Ince fears there will have to be an inquest. I am sending a note round to Humphrey Marden, asking him to represent the family. Armand's grandfather, being such an old man, will hardly be able to come over. . . ."

"Armand!"

"Armand le Mesurier, the young cousin I was expecting."

"By gad! mater. How wonderful you are!"

"I have asked Humphrey Marden to advise me. He and Dr. Ince will meet here presently."

"But Ince?"

"Dr. Ince will do what he can. I have explained . . . something. And he sends you a message. '*The jury will want to see the revolver.*'"

"The revolver! But——"

"There must be no buts."

Hesitatingly he said, "I have a pair."

"One has been discharged."

"*One has been discharged.* I'll see to it. Tell me more about this young cousin."

"Le Mesurier? He is the son of François le Mesurier, my mother's cousin; came over on a three months' visit prior to serving his time in the army."

"You have seen him?"

"Not until this morning. But, of course, I was expecting him. Kito tells me none of the clothes he has on are marked. I understand his luggage has not yet come. Is there anything more about him that you wish to tell me? Have I not carried out your wishes?"

Keightley was impressed by what was being suggested to him; the ingenuousness of it, and simplicity. He had often suspected his mother of ability,

but never had it so clearly been brought home to him. He knew that Humphrey Marden was an old and tried friend of his mother's. If a young relative of hers had met with an accident in her house, he would see that she suffered the least possible inconvenience. Dr. Ince would only have to tell the truth; say that the wound was self-inflicted. Kito was absolutely reliable.

Keightley kissed his mother before she went out of the room, although he was not often so demonstrative.

"I'll have a hat-band put on and get some ties."

"The revolver!"

"Oh! I'll do my part. You'll have the blinds pulled down."

"Send a paragraph round to the papers. I have already telegraphed to Brussels."

"To Brussels?" He came back into the room.

"I told Humphrey I would telegraph at once, and see if anyone wished to come over. But his grandfather is old, and there is no one else."

"I'm beginning to believe it is true."

"I said you were going out, and would take the telegram yourself."

Keightley went upstairs presently. The faithful Kito was still in charge; the room had been tidied, a sheet covered what was on the bed. Keightley had to do his part, and that curious, erratic mind of his found pleasure in setting the scene for the in-

quest, in making the story that was to be told complete in every part. Kito had to be coached, a certain amount of hand luggage improvised, and amongst it the case of revolvers with one cartridge discharged. Sometimes it seemed he was acting a play; at others compounding a felony. There was a sense of unreality over everything. At times during that long day and the next it seemed as if the farce could never be played out. At others as if it were all true, that the boy had come to visit them and shot himself accidentally within an hour of entering their house.

The only thing Keightley could not do in these two twilight days was to read the papers. It was bad enough when he went out, for he could not avoid the posters:

"BATTERSEA FLAT CRIME.  
"MURDER IN A FLAT."

How could there be anything in common between a sordid crime in a sordid flat in Battersea and the young boy who now lay in the coffin upon the trestles in the spare bedroom at Carlton House Terrace, his hands folded and his brow clear, flowers about him?

Because there was nothing in common between them, and because, under whatever Government or conditions we live, the law takes cognisance of consequence and believes in the words of the wealthy

and well represented, twelve good men and true, within forty-eight hours of his death, found Armand le Mesurier, second cousin of Mrs. Fecamp le Mesurier Wilbur, of Carlton House Terrace, had accidentally shot himself. There had been no delay in summoning assistance; there was no suspicion of suicide. He was at the commencement of a greatly looked forward to holiday. The whole proceedings took less than an hour, and "Death by Misadventure" was the unanimous verdict.

David Devenish, who met Keightley the same day, said a sympathetic word, and Keightley answered:

"It has upset my mother very much."

"I am sorry."

"And by the way, Devenish, that bet of ours is off. I'm going to take her south. I hate doing anything like what would be supposed to be my duty, but she isn't at all well, and roughing it at the *Paris* and Monte Carlo is a sacrifice I am prepared to make for her."

"Then you've given up the idea of finding out who murdered Harry Maingaye, of meeting the assassin whose eyes were familiar? By the way, I suppose you've heard about the Battersea Flat murder? Do you know the same woman has appeared upon the scene? The woman poor Dacre was visiting when he was shot was Inez de Brissac! You ought not to give the thing up until after the inquest;

there might easily be some fresh evidence, Dacre was Maingaye's friend. It looks fishy on the face of it."

Roger joined them, and David said to him:

"Wilbur says the bet is off; he admits to being unable to find the man with the extraordinary, familiar eyes who shot Harry Maingaye."

Roger Macphail's and Keightley's eyes met.

"I always thought he was making a mistake," Roger said coolly, as he took his seat. "He dreamed of that man in the passage: 'there was no sich pusson,' it was just a Mrs. Harris. Have you fellows ordered lunch?"

The conspiracy of silence was complete.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE END OF THE STORY

KEIGHTLEY WILBUR announced his intention of taking his mother to the Riviera.

He had brought an unconscious and dying young man to her house, and without question or comment, knowing only that he wished the identity of this strange guest to be concealed, she had invented the fiction that he was her cousin and sustained the story before court and coroner. But she had suffered from the shock of "Armand le Mesurier's" death in her house and it was up to so good a son as Keightley to see that her health and nerves were re-established. He made his own preparations for the journey hurriedly, and desired her to make none at all.

"We'll stay a few days in Paris. I have wired to the Ritz to reserve us one of their garden suites. You can buy all the clothes you want in Paris, and you'll have me to advise you."

"The time has gone by when it's easier or pleasanter to shop in Paris than in London," she remonstrated mildly.

"Oh! don't make objections, that is so like other women. We'll cross on Saturday."

Her nerves, notwithstanding what he said, had not

suffered anything like as much as his. She was really happy in having been of use to him.

"Very well, dear. Saturday it shall be."

Keightley proposed, but Roger Macphail disposed. The tickets were taken and the boxes packed. On Friday evening Keightley had a note from Roger:

"DEAR WILBUR,— You said yesterday that you were taking your mother to the Riviera. I suggest you reconsider your decision. Devenish is going over and could escort her.

"Have you read the enclosed reports of the Battersea Flat Case? If fresh evidence is not forthcoming, Guy Dacre will probably be arrested on Monday on suspicion of having shot his brother. — Yours."

The signature was the well-known hieroglyphic.

Fortunately Keightley was alone when he got this letter, for he turned pale, and swore as if he had been an ordinary man. He said "curse" and "damn"; he "wished to God people would mind their own business"; he said that he "wasn't going to be black-mailed or bullied by Roger Macphail"; he swore he should start to-morrow; and that the Battersea Flat murder was nothing to him.

After he had relieved his feelings in this way he sat down to read the enclosures, which were all extracts from various daily papers. Since the day of



"Armand le Mesurier's" death Keightley had avoided the newspapers.

"BATTERSEA FLAT CRIME.

"Mr. Stanley Dacre, the actor, aged fifty, was found shot on Saturday night in a flat at Warriner Gardens, Battersea Park. Shortly before six o'clock the policeman on duty heard a revolver-shot. The evening was foggy, and he was unable to immediately trace the sound, but subsequently in the rear of the premises known as No. 10 Warriner Gardens he discovered Mr. Dacre lying in the space outside the scullery door of the empty flat. He was still living, but died soon afterwards. Mr. Dacre's brother, who was in the building at the time, on a visit to a lady who occupied another flat there, also heard the shot, and, looking out of the window, saw a man getting over the garden wall. He rushed downstairs, where the police sergeant was already examining the wounded man. He was overwhelmed at the discovery that the victim was his own brother.

"All efforts to trace the man who was seen escaping over the garden wall have failed. No revolver has been found, and the idea of suicide is not entertained.

"The premises consist of three stories of flats. The bottom flat is unoccupied and the tenants of the top flat were away at the time.

"The middle flat is in the possession of Mrs. Inez

B. Mott, an American lady and well-known novelist.

"The supposed assailant is described as a man about five feet six inches in height, slenderly built, wearing a black morning coat."

The next extract was dated the following day. There were three of them altogether :

"The mystery of the death of Mr. Stanley Dacre has considerably deepened. No arrest has been made, but the lady who in yesterday's issue was described as Mrs. Inez B. Mott, novelist, has now been identified as the Comtesse de Brissac, whose evidence at the inquest on Harry Maingaye will be fresh in the minds of our readers. It will be remembered that Harry Maingaye, one of the most gifted and popular of our *jeunes premiers*, was killed by a revolver-shot when leaving the stage on the first night of Mr. Keightley Wilbur's successful play, *According to Cocker*. Mr. Stanley Dacre, who played the title rôle, was the last person to see Harry Maingaye alive. The affair made a great sensation at the time, and the most extraordinary rumours were afloat; rumours which the present tragic affair will certainly revive. The police followed every possible trail, but up to now without any satisfactory result."

The third extract was a report of the opening of the inquest :

"At the Battersea Coroner's Court yesterday Mr. Raymond Lake opened an inquiry into the death of Mr. Stanley Dacre, the well-known actor.

"Police Sergeant Ferris said that when on duty in Rosenau Road on the night of the 11th, he heard the sound of a shot, and went along Prince of Wales Terrace and Warriner Gardens, flashing his lamp before him. The night was foggy. The witness related entering the ground-floor flat of No. 10 Warriner Gardens, and what he found there. He then went up to the first-floor flat, where his knock was answered by a lady now identified as the Comtesse de Brissac, to whom he said:

"'There's a man been shot downstairs. Can I come through and make a search?' She said, 'Come in! I heard a shot fired, and saw a man climb over the wall.'

"The witness went in, and saw a gentleman, who he now knew to be Mr. Guy Dacre, Mr. Stanley Dacre's brother, who said: 'I will go down with you. Who is the man? Do you know what occurred? We thought we heard a shot.' Half-way down he changed his mind and said: 'Perhaps I'd better go back. My friend is very nervous.' He seemed very nervous himself.

"I said I thought he'd better take a look at him. When we got downstairs I turned the light on the face of the dead man. 'Do you know him?' I asked; and Mr. Dacre said 'No.' The lady came

half-way down the stairs with a lamp, and went back again.

"Inspector Norreys said that when informed at the station that a man had been shot at No. 10 War-riner Gardens he sent for the Divisional Surgeon, and set out himself with four constables and an ambulance. When he got to the scene of the murder, he posted constables outside and telegraphed to the superintendent of the detective inspectors. He ordered that no private person was to be allowed to enter or leave the premises. He went up to the occupied flat and saw Mr. Guy Dacre, who said he felt sick and wanted fresh air. He had previously said he ought to be home by eight o'clock; his wife would be expecting him. The witness asked him if he persisted that he did not know the dead man, and he said: 'Of course not. How should I?'

"He was then shown a card that had been found on the body. He exclaimed: 'Good God! that's my brother's card!' The witness told him he should take him to the station pending inquiries. To which he made no reply. At the station he asked: 'Is that my brother Stanley who was shot?' and the witness replied: 'I don't know; you will hear later.'

"Mr. Dacre said again: 'I cannot think it is my brother.'

"Witness remarked: 'I don't know. I want you to understand that you are detained for inquiries to be made, and for nothing else.'

"He then burst into a fit of crying, put his hand to his face, and said: 'Good God! it is my brother!' There had been nothing but the card to make him think so after he had seen the body.

"Detective Sergeant Earle said he carefully examined the body before it was removed, and found a latchkey, several letters addressed to 'Stanley Dacre, Esq., 114 Blomfield Gardens, Maida Vale,' and a small book with his card in it, a sort of diary. The latchkey fitted the lock of Mrs. Mott's front door.

"Further police evidence was concerned with Mr. Guy Dacre's detention at the police station. He gave no explanation of why he had failed to recognise his brother when he first saw him, and made confused and contradictory answers to the questions put to him.

"After an adjournment for lunch the medical evidence was called.

"Dr. John Becker gave evidence as to the examination of the body. He said that Mr. Guy Dacre came into the scullery whilst the body was being examined, and he heard the conversation between him and Police Sergeant Ferris, when Mr. Dacre said that he did not recognise the man. The light was fairly good.

"Witness was afterwards called to see Mrs. Mott, who was in a condition of extreme nervous collapse. She trembled in every limb, and complained bitterly of cold. Beads of perspiration dropped from her

face, which was ashen grey. As she was almost pulseless, the witness ordered her to have brandy, and he remained with her till 1.45 A. M., and was present during part of the time that Inspector Rushton took her statement. Before that she told the witness that the deceased had had a severe shock about a year ago, and since then he had been very suspicious and jealous. The witness understood the shock in question was the death of Mr. Harry Maingaye.

"She asked several times for Mr. Guy Dacre, and when she was told he was detained at the police station became intensely agitated.

"Mr. Colvin, for Guy Dacre, who was next called, said his client was not in court, and he had advised him at this stage of the case to decline to give evidence. Mr. Dacre had been detained at the police-station, his house and his office had been searched, and he himself shadowed. There was no excuse at all for these high-handed proceedings, and he was in correspondence on the subject with the Commissioner of Police.

"The coroner asked if he admitted that his client and Mr. Stanley Dacre had not been upon good terms.

" 'We admit nothing,' was the reply.

"The diary that had been found in the dead man's pocket was then called for. The entries showed that he was very jealous of Mrs. Mott, and that he had been watching her. 'She has ruined my life,' was

the entry that appeared in one part. 'I have ruined my life for her and betrayed my best friend,' was in another. 'Now she is deceiving me.'

" 'He meant, I suppose, deceiving him by receiving the visits of his brother?'

" Mr. Colvin said warmly that the coroner had no right to draw that conclusion. Mr. Guy Dacre had no idea that his brother knew Mrs. Mott. She had not at that time been identified with the Comtesse de Brissac.

" 'And is there any explanation forthcoming as to why Mr. Guy Dacre, confronted with his brother's corpse, repudiated any knowledge of him?'

" 'I am informed the light was exceedingly bad.'

" At the close of the day's proceedings the coroner said that he thought Mr. Guy Dacre had been ill-advised in declining to appear. He would not say any more at the moment, in order to give him an opportunity to reconsider his position. The court would adjourn until Monday, and all the witnesses would be bound over."

When Keightley Wilbur had finished reading these extracts he had another short spell of anger against Roger Macphail for having sent them to him. Then he sat down at his desk and dashed off a note:

"DEAR MACPHAIL,— Why don't you stick to your palette and canvases? What has the Battersea Flat case to do with you, or, for the matter of that,

with me? If you were not such a fine artist I should execrate you in terms. As it is, I suggest you see me off to-morrow at Victoria. For, believe me, not to save Guy Dacre or any other fool from the consequences of his folly will I change my plans. Back to your paint-pot, your transcendental dauber, and leave me to my philosophy! — Yours,

“K. W.”

Having sent off the letter and decided to think no more about the extracts or the case, it is perhaps needless to say he could get neither the one nor the other out of his mind. He *did* know who had shot Stanley Dacre, and why this summary vengeance had been taken; that the murderer had already answered for his crime. But what did Roger Macphail know? Roger had painted Louis de Brissac under the title of “The Young Count.” Did he identify his sitter with the young man who had arrived at Carlton House Terrace on the night of the murder, met with a fatal accident, and been buried, after an inquest had been duly held, under the name of “Armand le Mesurier”? Did Roger know or guess what part he, Keightley, had taken in that sad night’s work? And if so — if so —

Keightley could not rid himself of query or uneasiness. Again he heard the shot and saw the boy drop from the wall, he chased him and listened to that laboured breath. Now they were upon the



bridge, and he called him by his name: "Louis de Brissac — Count Louis de Brissac!"

Again he saw the anguished, startled eyes, and was too late to avert the consequences of his rash call. Again he led the stumbling steps towards the motor, and felt upon his hands the warm drip, drip of mucilaginous blood.

What had happened in the flat? He had not stayed to ask, nor gone back to ask. And if he was uneasy or sleepless because he had failed in doing this, he yet justified himself. He was an amateur and not a professional detective. The police were already on the spot when he started to run. It was their affair and not his.

Roger Macphail and David Devenish were standing together on the platform of Victoria Station the next morning when Keightley Wilbur arrived with his mother. David was going to spend Christmas at Monte Carlo, according to habit. Roger only wanted to speak to Keightley, to impress his view upon him.

"Let me have a word with you alone," Roger said when greetings had been exchanged. Keightley frowned and answered hastily:

"I can't stop, my dear fellow; my mother is with me."

"Can I be of any use?" David asked, looking from one of them to another.

"Thanks," Keightley answered hurriedly. "Thanks. Where are your things? We might as well get places together."

Keightley's mother knew, and greeted, both his friends. She said she was glad Mr. Devenish was coming with them, for all that she was secretly disappointed at not having her son to herself. And she asked Roger how it was that he remained in England when the climate was so impossible for his work. With infinite difficulty Roger found an opportunity for that word alone with Keightley. He had already assured Mrs. Wilbur that he liked painting in grey weather.

"Don't go, Wilbur," he said then, earnestly. "Let Devenish take your mother over. Stay in England at least until after Monday — until after the next hearing of this Battersea Flat Case. The circumstances are all so strange. Guy Dacre is suspected of having shot his brother. Suppose he should not be able to clear himself?"

"You've gone muzzy! What concern have I with the Dacres or their affairs?" Keightley answered angrily.

"You knew Mrs. Mott, visited her."

"What has that to do with you?"

How much or how little did Roger know? Keightley's nerves were on edge, and he was in the mood to quarrel with his best friend. "It's not your business, anyway."

"Stay, if it is only to keep up the tradition of your interest in these coroners' court cases."

"It is only a tradition now. I am sick of them."

"Did Guy Dacre shoot his brother?"

"How the devil should I know?"

"You *do* know. I'm sorry, Wilbur. But you force my hand."

"*Your* hand?"

"Armand le Mesurier"—at the mention of the name Wilbur coloured violently—"is supposed to have shot himself by accident in the spare bedroom of your house in Carlton House Terrace."

"Supposed! What do you mean by supposed? There was an inquest; the jury found ——"

"Come, come, Wilbur. What do you or I care for the irresponsible findings of coroners' juries? A girl who sits for me sometimes, and who is sister to a housemaid in your house, has a curious story to tell. She was not called as a witness, but she says the young man was shot *before he entered the house*. That she saw you and your Japanese valet supporting him."

Keightley's thin and expressive face became merely obstinate.

"She should have come forward at the time," he said coldly. "It's too late now."

"She will never come forward; that is not the question. It is no question of evidence or outside interference. Wilbur, this is between you and me.

And words are unnecessary, too many words. We know who killed Harry Maingaye; we suspect, or perhaps you know, who killed Stanley Dacre. I am with you all the way, or further, in desiring not to share our knowledge with anybody. But if it should come to letting an innocent man suffer . . . ?”

The guard came up, touched his hat.

“It’s time to take your seat, sir.”

Keightley wavered for a moment, stood uncertain, undecided.

“That would be all very well if it *were* a man,” he said in the old manner, with a careless shrug. “But this fellow is only a stockbroker. See you in April ——”

The porter held the door open, the guard waved his green flag, the hissing of the engine changed into a shriek, slowly and with dignity the train moved out of the station. From the platform Roger Macphail saw Keightley Wilbur lean out of the window, wave his cap to him. Now he, and then the train, was out of sight.

On Monday, at the adjourned inquest on Stanley Dacre, Roger Macphail, with difficulty and some reluctance, forced his way into the crowded court and stood amongst less well-motivated idlers, listening whilst one policeman after another was called to give repetitive and unimportant evidence.

Roger saw that Mr. Guy Dacre was in court, a man with a pale, flabby face and a single eye-glass, obviously exceedingly nervous, turning every few minutes to speak to his counsel. He sat between an elderly clergyman in shabby canonicals and a lady with tired eyes and fashionable clothes, who was understood to be his wife. To-day he was, it appeared, willing to go into the witness-box. The coroner remarked significantly that he was glad he had reconsidered his position. Mr. Colvin rose quickly and said that was a most improper observation, and there was a short interchange of discourtesies.

Mr. Guy Dacre, duly sworn, said he was a stock-broker, and gave an address in Mount Street, Piccadilly. He was thirty-seven years of age, married, with one child. He went on :

“ I had no idea my brother was intimate with Mrs. Mott. I did not know her under that name. It is not true that we were old friends. I had known her a little over six weeks. I first made her acquaintance in Battersea Park. She appealed to me for protection. It was towards evening, and she said she was sure she was being followed ; she was panting and obviously frightened. On that occasion I saw her home.”

The witness admitted he had not wished his wife to know of these visits, and in reply to Mr. Colvin said that was the reason of his confused statement

at the police-station. He said he had now made a clean breast of everything to his wife.

Witness then said that on the evening of the crime he went with Mrs. Mott to see some new fittings in her bedroom — the room had been repapered and there was a new bed and curtains. They had been there a short time when they heard the shot. He went over to the window.

The coroner asked quickly :

“Where does the bedroom look on to?”

“The outside staircase. I saw a man who had just jumped over the lower wall.”

“You saw this man?”

“Yes.”

“What was he doing?”

“Lying almost full length on the trellis-work of the wall. He dropped down into the garden and then I did not see him again.”

“Could you give us any description of him?”

“He seemed very young, almost a boy, fair-haired, in dark clothes and cap. That was all I saw.”

“And Mrs. Mott, did she see this man?”

“I thought he had dropped out of sight before she joined me at the window. But she said she saw him too.”

“What did you do then?”

“We then went into the sitting-room. A minute later a policeman knocked at the door. Mrs. Mott

admitted him. I followed him down the staircase; then I saw Stanley. . . .” He stopped and showed some emotion.

The coroner:

“Tell us what your sensations and beliefs were then. You did not know it was your brother?”

“I saw a man unconscious and apparently badly wounded, bleeding, deadly white, and naturally I never thought about it being any one I knew. Then everything seemed to happen at once. Mrs. Mott went into hysterics and began screaming. A doctor arrived and a whole posse of policemen. I asked the inspector if he would want me any more. When he said ‘Yes,’ I went upstairs again. I spoke to Mrs. Mott and tried to soothe her — said it was probably a frustrated attempt at a burglary. I did not know then that the man was dead. It was getting late, so I went down again and told Sergeant Ferris I could not stay. He told me he was afraid I should not be able to go. I began to feel the strain of the whole thing and wanted to get into the fresh air. Then the inspector asked me if I knew any one of the name of Dacre. Afterwards I was taken to the police-station.”

Mrs. Mott, who was accompanied by a hospital nurse and attended by a doctor, was next called. She looked very ill and was accommodated with a seat. She gave her evidence in a low voice that was at times nearly inaudible.

"My name is Inez de Brissac. I am a novelist, and occupy No. 1 B Flat, Warriner Gardens. I have lived there for about four months. Stanley Dacre, now lying dead, was an old friend of mine. He did occupy the ground-floor flat, but left about three weeks ago.

"About five o'clock on the day of the murder his brother, Guy Townsend Dacre, called upon me by appointment. He had visited me before. Neither brother knew of the visits of the other. We sat and talked in the sitting-room. After we had had tea I showed him some decorations I had carried out in my bedroom; whilst doing so we heard a shot. He said, 'What on earth is that?' and threw open the window. I went to him and saw a man scrambling over the wall dividing our back from the adjoining one to the right. Then we went again into the sitting-room, and almost immediately Sergeant Ferris knocked at the door and told us a man had been shot.

"I last saw Mr. Stanley Dacre about three weeks ago, when we had a few words. It was the day he left the ground-floor flat."

Asked as to the cause of the quarrel, the witness hesitated and then said:

"He accused me of having men at the flat. He said 'It's all over,' meaning our friendship. He struck me; it was not for the first time."

Further queries elicited with difficulty the admis-



sion that she had known Mr. Stanley Dacre in the life-time of Harry Maingaye, whose friend he was. That after Harry Maingaye's death they had been together for some time, but never happily. Mr. Dacre was always jealous and suspicious of her; thought frequently that they were followed or watched, would talk constantly about Harry Maingaye's death, and question and cross-question her as to who it could have been that murdered him. "He made me wretched," she exclaimed, "he treated me dreadfully." Asked whether she had at any time any idea as to who had murdered Harry Maingaye, she answered in the negative, seemed greatly affected, and for a few minutes was unable to go on.

The coroner asked her if she could give any description of the man she saw getting over the garden wall.

"What had he on, for instance?"

"He had on a light overcoat, a felt hat — Monte Carlo shape; dark hair."

"Was he any one you knew or could recognise?"

She began to speak, and, according to one of the reporters, said she thought she did know the man. Before, however, she had finished her sentence she grew very white, and the next moment appeared to faint or collapse, and had to be carried from the box.

The coroner immediately drew the attention of the jury to the discrepancy in the description of the man who was supposed to have got over the garden

wall. Nobody had seen this person except Mrs. Mott and Mr. Guy Dacre, the two people who might have the best possible interest in proving his existence. He added significantly that even in these trying circumstances they had been unable to agree as to his appearance, age, or clothes.

At this point Mr. Colvin intervened on behalf of his client. He said an attempt was being made to implicate him in this crime, with which his only connection was the accident of his presence in the flat.

The coroner asked if he was animadverting on the way in which he was conducting the case. Mr. Colvin answered hotly, and it was understood affirmatively.

Then followed what was afterwards described as "a scene in court." At the end of which there was a further adjournment. There seemed to be a consensus of opinion that Mr. Guy Dacre was in a very ugly position. Nobody believed he had not recognised his brother. The story of the man who had been seen getting over the garden wall — whom he had described as young and fair, in a dark tweed suit and cap, and Mrs. Mott as dark, dressed in a light overcoat and Monte Carlo hat — was equally, if not more, incredible.

The court emptied quickly. Roger Macphail was not nearly as surprised as he pretended when, before he got to the end of the street, he felt a hand upon his arm.

"So you did not go after all?" was what he said.

"Yes, I did," Keightley answered. "I went as far as Paris. Got back last night. Fact is, I met Willie Kirsch, Mrs. Mott's publisher, and he could talk of nothing but this case and the Comtesse de Brissac, who, by the way, he called 'Inez.' He had a book of hers in the press at the moment, which he says he shall withdraw. 'Every man who has called at that flat or visited her at any time will be a marked man. I told you she was a very dangerous woman when you asked me for an introduction. My advice to you now is to get out of the way, to go to Egypt or Taormina. Why not Taormina?' " Keightley imitated Willie Kirsch's stammering insistency. "Well, Macphail, you know as well as I do that a man like me cannot allow himself to be advised by a Willie Kirsch. My mother likes Devenish, and he will look after her at Monte. Where are you going? I'll walk part of the way with you. The adjournment is for a week, isn't it? I was watching your stockbroker friend. If ever I saw a man blue with funk he was the man; he looked as if he expected to be hanged, and knew he deserved it."

The two walked on together out of the sordid surroundings of the coroner's court, to where the sun pierced through the gloom and lit into a strange foggy splendour the river and the buildings on either side.

"He is drink-soddened or life-soddened, natur-

ally nervous," Roger answered thoughtfully. "But there is a good deal I don't understand."

"You are not a psychological novelist," Keightley answered lightly.

"Let me hear your view."

"Well, to begin with, Mr. Guy Townsend Dacre is not one of your 'splendid sinners.' Get the circumstances well into your mind. Then you'll find the root word of what followed is '*reaction*.' Even before that shot was fired the man was probably thinking how quickly he could get away. It was not true that he did not recognise his brother. What was true was that he did not look at him. He saw blood and could not face it, envisaged publicity and became panic-stricken. At the police-station some one warned him that anything he said might be used against him, and that made matters worse. He did not know what to confess or what to deny."

"Every sign of guilt was upon him."

"M'yes. But it was not blood-guilt."

"Then, how do you account for the description of the man they both saw; the descriptions so precise and yet so different."

Keightley stopped short with an exclamation. Then he looked at his companion.

"Do you really mean you don't know?"

"Do you really mean you do?"

"Dacre saw de Brissac. Inez saw — *me*."

"Good God! You were there? But, of course — now I begin to understand."

"I went there because I wanted to know who shot Harry Maingaye, and I felt the clue would be in Inez de Brissac's hands. Until I saw her son's face in your picture at the Grafton Gallery, although the clue was there, I never grasped it. Then when, all at once, I knew who it was that was watching, following her, I rushed off to Warriner Gardens to warn, advise — I thought I should have been in time to prevent any further tragedy. That was what I hoped. I saw him getting over the wall and bolted in pursuit. I got up to him on the bridge, called him by name ——"

"And he turned the gun on himself?"

"I did not know then that he had shot Stanley Dacre. I believe I should have done the same thing if I had been in his place." Keightley showed unusual signs of feeling. "The woman was his mother — *his mother!* His mind must have been unhinged ever since, without any preparation or warning, he heard a word launched against her. He was a cadet in the army then — little more than a boy. He ran away. There must have followed months of hiding, perhaps of privation, under a changed name, not the name of which he had been proud, that he would keep clean. He left that clean, good name to his father, to his step-brothers. For

himself he hid, skulked, waited, watched. Roger, what bitter thoughts must have come to him! And perhaps, in his utter loneliness, a sudden softening, a mother-want, forgiveness. For all that it was through her that he was a criminal and hunted, without place or name. I'll tell you what he said in his delirium, when he was dying." Keightley Wilbur walked more quickly that Roger should not see his face as he told him.

"*'She kissed me once. When I was small and lay in my cot, frightened of the dark, she came in, so beautiful and soft, perfumed like flowers, bent over and kissed me.'*" Now Keightley stood still.

"Roger, he called out to her when he was dying. '*Mother,*' he said, his eyes lighting as if he saw her. '*Kiss me again, mother.*' And then — he died."

They walked on without speaking until Keightley again broke the silence.

"He had seen this man strike her and lay in wait for him. I can put myself into his mind, his poor disordered mind. When he shot Harry Maingaye he killed all his own youth, his future and his pride. But when he shot Stanley Dacre it was for her. Because, notwithstanding what she was and had done, she was still his mother. And in the measureless loneliness of his long disordered days he remembered that when he had been small she came to him, once, in the darkness and kissed him in his cot. It was well that he died, Roger. There is no room in

the world for a proud youngster whose mother's name is a byword among men."

This pause was longer than the last. At the end of it Roger was startled to hear him say:

"That is why I don't know what to do. You said 'Don't go,' and I came back. Not because I thought Guy Dacre was in any jeopardy, or cared if he were, or if I myself were. Neither of us counts. And if the truth comes out, the whole truth, neither of us would suffer. But she would."

"She?"

"My mother. Don't you begin to see? Louis de Brissac lies in the family mausoleum at Severne Park. To help me and save further scandal, impulsively, perhaps recklessly, my mother identified him as her 'young cousin, Armand le Mesurier!' She assailed her own fine honour and I connived at it, let her do it. Now, look. Inez recognised me, there is hardly a doubt about it. What is going to happen when she says so?"

"You would have to tell the truth."

"And how credible will it be? I could say I went there to save Louis de Brissac from committing another crime. To the question, how long had I known him, or how well I knew him, my answer is this: that I did not know him at all! Up to that evening I had seen nothing of him but his portrait. Roger, the story won't hold water. I should not care a bit if only myself was concerned. But how

am I to account for my mother's share in the matter?"

"She did it for you."

"We should have to find a jury of altruists to believe the truth, and then they wouldn't. The very moment she sees my name in the papers she will rush back . . ."

"Mrs. Mott's identification will go for nothing if Guy Dacre persists in his."

"The more brilliant a fellow is the greater the danger of his eclipsing his own path."

Keightley, although gloomy, was better when he began to make phrases, and Roger got a little reassured about him. But he did not let him out of his sight all that day. He even took him to the studio.

"You had better make a sketch of me. Rather than drag my mater into this and let her be cross-examined and her word doubted, I shall shoot myself. Then your drawing will be worth money. I count, you know. Nobody could do the work I've done and not count. What a tragedy if I had to go out over a thing like this!"

"Don't talk rot. You won't go out."

"I suppose I had better see a first-class lawyer. Are there any first-class lawyers, or only those with reputations?"

Roger, his palette on his thumb, was walking backwards and forwards, studying his subject, roughing it on the canvas, posing and altering the position.



Roger did not know any other way of making Keightley keep even approximately still.

"Colvin is the best man for you to see — Marcus Colvin, Guy Dacre's lawyer; he is often at the Savoy. You might be able to pump him as to Dacre's position; pretend he is a friend or acquaintance of yours. As soon as you know that Dacre is in no danger you can think exclusively of your mother, and incidentally of yourself. Do you know Dacre, by the way?"

"I'm not a Cabinet Minister. It is only Cabinet Ministers who can afford to know stockbrokers."

It was late in the evening of the day before the adjourned inquest that Keightley and Roger, supping together, saw not only that clean-shaven young barrister, Mr. Marcus Colvin, but also his client, Mr. Guy Dacre, at a well-filled round table in the grill room of the Savoy.

"Now is your chance," said Roger. "Can't you join them? Do you recognise any of the ladies?"

Keightley's spirits had fluctuated very much in the interval. But Roger shrewdly suspected that the more he talked of suicide the less he contemplated it. The papers reported that Mrs. Mott was still ill, suffering from valvular disease of the heart. If any further evidence was wanted from her, it would probably have to be taken on commission. There was what Keightley called "a good sporting chance."

Guy Dacre's position was really more precarious than his; yet here was Guy Dacre, obviously enjoying his supper.

"Do I know any of the houris? I should rather think I do!" He rattled off their names. "Ella-line Blaney and I are old friends; I'll go and ask her how Devenish is getting on at Monte. She's sure to have heard. The other men are not up to much; baccarat boys, pigeons and hawks. They've been pointed out to me before."

He carried out his intention, and came back to tell Roger they were all going on to play *chemin de fer*, and had asked him to join them.

"The blotchy young man with the bulging forehead is host. He says he will make himself responsible for me! I told him I was awfully grateful, and he said: 'Not at all; that's all right,' in a most friendly manner. Getting on in the world, ain't I?"

"You will be careful," Roger said.

"What of? Of being fleeced? That doesn't matter. I haven't much on me, though. What have you got? Lend me all you have."

Roger had half a crown, a few coppers, and a French fifty-franc note.

"Never mind; I daresay I shall manage. Anyway, by this time to-morrow I shall know the position. You'd better breakfast with me. Eleven or eleven-thirty?"

"The inquest is at eleven. I'll be with you at ten."

Keightley rejoined the party, and soon made himself at home with them.

There were motors waiting at the door of the restaurant, and presently they all went off. Keightley did not hear what address was given, but quite soon the cars drew up at a door in Coventry Street.

"Don't give your own name," was the hurried instruction of the young man who had offered to be responsible for Keightley Wilbur. "We're all anonymous. You twig? I call myself Jackson."

The party of three women and five men, all in evening dress, got out, and a policeman on his beat looked conveniently the other way. They passed the not very exacting regard of a one-armed Cerberus who opened the door to them.

"Friends of Mr. Jackson! Oh, yes, on the second floor. You will find Captain Biddell there, and a few people."

A big fair man had the croupier's seat at the long green-covered table and there were already a few punters. The big fair man was introduced as Captain Biddell, but which branch of His Majesty's Service he represented was not stated. He made them welcome, and said he was "glad to see any friend of Charlie Jackson." He then drew their attention to a crowded buffet and begged them to help themselves. He said he thought later on they would

have a good game. It was now about 1.30 A. M.

Every phase of life in London was known to Keightley Wilbur, but this was the first time he had been in an illegal gambling hell. He hoped his new experience would be completed by a raid, but was not destined to realise his ambition. There was a redistribution of seats, caused by the entrance of their party, and he found himself, perhaps not without a little manœuvring, between Marcus Colvin and Guy Dacre. When the wooden box containing the cards travelled round to him, he had to confess that he did not know what to do with it, and had never played *chemin de fer* before. With the camaraderie of the casino, they taught him how to separate a card and then another from the pack, and duplicate the movement. He staked a fiver on their advice, turned it into ten, and the ten into twenty, at the cost of a sovereign to Captain Biddell.

Dacre urged: "Go on; play it up again;" and Colvin suggested, more judiciously, that he should "take it in."

The blotchy young man called out, "Be a sport!" and Keightley released another card.

Then some one said "Banquo!" and Keightley, wondering what Macbeth had to do in this *galère*, went on dealing. Before he found the connection "*Neuf*" was announced exultantly, and the money he had gained and the fiver he had staked were all

swept away. And he found he had also lost the privilege of the deal.

"What a damned silly game!" he said.

Guy Townsend Dacre, of the flabby face and single eye-glass, explained, in a voice that matched his face, how easily he might have turned his five pounds into forty. Then every one seemed to go on doing the same thing, and the cabalistic talk never varied:

"A card?"

"No."

"Six."

"Sept."

"He stopped on a five!" or "He drew on a five!" Either of which actions seemed to be equally reprehensible.

"Curse it, I'm baccarat again. Did you ever see such luck?"

"I'll go it," or "I'll see it." And there were calculations as to the amount due to the *cagnotte*.

Keightley, never so bored in his life, was yawning and wondering how much longer he would be able to stand it, when Marcus Colvin pushed back his chair and said:

"I'm off. Are you coming?" he asked his client, over Keightley's head.

"Let's have one more deal. I haven't had a pass the whole evening."

"You are not bound to have one if you stay. It's past three. We have to be in court at eleven. You'd better come."

But Mr. Dacre, whose attentions to the buffet had proved unremitting, decided to try his luck once more.

"Are you going my way?" Keightley asked, seeing his opportunity and taking it quickly. "I've had enough, too."

The two men went out together.

"What an atmosphere!"

"Lentil soup and tobacco. Do you find it amusing? I suppose there are any number of these places still open?"

"I fancy so. No! I don't find it amusing. I can't afford to play high. Punting in fivers doesn't give you much of a chance. I really came to-night because I wanted to keep an eye on a client."

"Dacre?"

"Yes. The case comes on again to-morrow."

"Takes it easy, doesn't he? He seems to me to be in a devil of a mess."

Marcus Colvin rather shut up when he was approached so directly as that, and Keightley had to alter his tactics. They talked of the weather and the difficulty of finding a taxi. Mr. Colvin, it appeared, lived in Hampstead. He extolled the air of that salubrious suburb, but admitted the difficulty of getting to it.

"If you can walk as far as Carlton House Terrace with me, I'll knock up my chauffeur, and he will run you home in no time."

One expands more easily to a young man who lives in Carlton House Terrace and puts a motor at your disposal, than to one you meet casually in a night house. While Kito was getting the car ready, and his host was supplying him with a good Havana, Marcus Colvin found himself talking more freely about the Battersea Flat murder.

"I am interested in coroners' courts," Keightley explained. "I am projecting a series of articles to be called 'The Story Behind the Verdict.'"

"In this case I should think you will get your story *before* the verdict is given."

"No; you don't say so!"

"It will come out when Mrs. Mott identifies the man *she* saw get over the garden wall."

"She can identify him?"

"She knew him well enough. That was the man Stanley was jealous of, not Guy, who had been to the flat only three times altogether."

"There is no doubt, then, that there *was* a man — that Guy Dacre did not shoot his own brother?"

"The whole inquiry so far has been an absolute farce. The coroner doesn't know his business. Stanley Dacre was killed by a revolver shot. The police were on the premises within three minutes. Guy is searched at the police-station, Mrs. Mott is

searched, and the premises; no revolver is found. Neither of them could have eaten it. *Ipso facto*, neither of them shot the man."

"Then Guy Dacre is in no danger?"

"No more than you."

Keightley paled.

"Than I?" he said mechanically. "Shall I fill your glass again?"

"Than you or me. Thanks, yes. Dacre would never even have been suspected if he had not told so many lies. No! Dacre is in no danger." He tossed off his glass. "Fact is, we've as good as got the man."

"Good God!" Marcus Colvin was pleased with the effect he was making.

"The man of whom Stanley was jealous, for whom he was watching, the man who shot him . . . I say, one can see you're not used to these hours; you've gone the colour of a candle."

"I get a touch of migraine now and again. It isn't the hours. Who did you say the man was? But I suppose that is a secret."

"I hope it won't be this time to-morrow. We shall have to get it from her. I've got a detective there now, watching, in touch with the doctor. At the slightest change I'm on the spot with a magistrate; we get her dispositions."

"She hasn't spoken yet, then?"

"No; but she will. Well! I must be going;



I heard the car a couple of minutes ago. Thanks so much. I hope we shall meet again." He laughed when he was in the hall. "I say, I see you wear a light coat and a Monte Carlo hat. I shouldn't, if I were you. That was what the fellow who shot Stanley Dacre had on."

"Well! It's not exactly fancy dress." Keightley laughed too; but less when he was alone. He stood on the doorstep long after the motor was out of sight, sweating in the cold night air.

How had it come about that he had allowed his mother to follow him into this morass, lie for him, soil her whiteness? He swore that if there were no other way out he would take the way he had told Roger. Even now he pictured her in the witness-box, her charm and distinction exposed to the vulgar curiosity of the crowd, cornered into contradicting herself by a clumsy brute like this Marcus Colvin, for instance.

"Well! At any rate I shall know the worst by to-morrow. At the worst I suppose one might prove an alibi. Roger would lie for me — Kito, of course — Devenish, too, if it came to it. But one would have to tell him everything. The other way is better; just to go out. What an amazing end to a career like mine! Meteor-like!"

He tried to make phrases, but in an emergency like the present they helped him extraordinarily little. Kito, when he came back with the car, provided him

with a few hours of doctored sleep. But the Keightley Wilbur who gave Roger Macphail breakfast the next morning and drove with him afterwards to the coroner's court was a very silent young man from whom the spirit of epigram and paradox had temporarily departed. Roger bade him pull himself together.

"Whatever happens, don't be taken by surprise."

"Do I look bad?"

"A little white about the gills."

"It is really not for myself I care. If only I'd kept the mater out of it!" He had lost for the moment even the power of pretence.

The court was more crowded than before, and it was with difficulty they secured a seat. Then came the time of waiting, an interminable ten minutes, voices and words reaching them as through a mist.

"I wonder who they will call first."

"They'll call her for sure."

"She knows right enough who did it. Another of her fancy men."

"Will they do nothing to her? Women like that ought to be whipped from the cart tail."

"If I had my way ——"

"Hush! Here he is."

"Here's the coroner."

They all rose.

Everybody spoke in a hushed whisper. To-day, surely to-day there would be sensational evidence.

"Another policeman! How disappointing. We've heard what the police have to say."

Sergeant Ferris repeated his former evidence, adding that he was quite positive that no revolver had been found on Mrs. Mott nor Mr. Dacre, nor upon the premises; which had been thoroughly searched.

There passed in and out of the witness-box a succession of inspectors, sergeants, and ordinary policemen. All that they were asked, and that they had to testify, was that the flat and the whole house had been thoroughly searched, and that no weapon had been discovered.

Now came a pause. Then Mrs. Inez B. Mott's name was called.

Roger saw that the pallor of Keightley's cheeks was ashen, but the brightness of his eyes undimmed. Some one went up and spoke to the coroner, and the coroner bent down to listen. When he spoke, he spoke very shortly and as if annoyed at the news that had just been conveyed to him. But all he said was:

"Are there any more witnesses to call?"

There seemed to be something in the nature of a consultation between the various inspectors, and one of them spoke to Marcus Colvin.

"What do you suppose is happening?"

"He is going to sum up."

Question and answer were laconic. Roger knew Keightley's self-control was strained to its limit.

"Gentlemen ——" The coroner gave a brief summary of the admitted facts of the case, and went over again all the dreary evidence.

"Now I come to the most curious part of this strange case. There were only two people in the flat at the time, and apparently both of them saw the criminal, who, having fired the shot, climbed over the garden wall, and dropped out of sight. They both saw him, but in every possible detail their description differs. I hoped, gentlemen, that upon further examination Mrs. Mott would have been able to correct or explain this discrepancy. She was understood in the court to say she thought she recognised the man, who, possibly, was also an habitu  of the flat. Unfortunately ——"

When the coroner said "unfortunately," and paused, the blood flowed slowly back into Keightley's face, and Roger felt the relaxation of his strained attention.

"—— Unfortunately, Mrs. Mott never recovered consciousness after she left the court. She can add nothing to her evidence. The information has just been brought me that she passed away at an early hour this morning."

Both the men lost the next sentence or two.

"Can't we get out?"

"We may as well hear the finish. He cannot be long now."

Without leaving the box, the jury returned the verdict to which they had been directed :

“ Wilful murder against some man unknown.”

“ Close shave, wasn't it? ” Keightley said an hour or two later. He was completely himself again when he gave that light coat and Monte Carlo hat to the cloak-room attendant at the Savoy. “ But, of course, she could never have been absolutely sure. The night was foggy. At the worst, it would only have been a matter for a clever counsel and an alibi. I can't think why I got so excited about it. I am afraid, by the way, I shan't be able to give you another sitting for that picture. Wait while I 'phone Kito to pack and get the tickets. I shall go straight through to Monte this time. No more coroner's court stories for me. After all, it's bad copy. There is no culminating point of interest, and the principal character is dead before the curtain goes up.”

## CHAPTER IX

### LA VALLIÈRE AND HER PEARLS

THE last thing that seemed possible when Keightley Wilbur left London, and freed himself finally from the nightmare of the Harry Maingaye and Stanley Dacre murders, from the Battersea Flat Case, and the suicide of the young Count Louis de Brissac, was that he should ever again concern himself with the history of hidden crime or the mystery of the verdicts of coroners' juries.

He travelled by the so-called *train de luxe* between London and Monte Carlo, suffering, but not gladly, the discomforts and deficiencies of that much advertised and greatly over-priced route; the limited accommodation and wretched washing arrangements, the dirt and continual luggage examinations, the jolting over the badly-laid lines, and the perspiring service of greasy food. Finally he found himself arriving at the most inconvenient hour of all the twenty-four, when everybody was either lounging in the hall of the Hôtel de Paris, watching the pigeons strutting before the café, or mounting the steps of the Casino in order to be in time for the opening of the private rooms. Keightley was unshaven and in

need of his breakfast, a bath, a change of clothes. He had the idea that any of his friends or acquaintances who saw him in his present condition would have the decency to look the other way. His mother, for instance, was nowhere about.

But Georges Carpenter, the polyglot millionaire newspaper proprietor, rose up from his easy chair in the hall of the hotel, put out a hand like a manicured mutton-chop, and greeted him in a voice that had at least one more disadvantage than the proverbial bassoon.

"Ah! my friend, Mr. Keightley Wilbur. Now this is very pleasant, and I am glad to see you. You have come for a long stay?"

"Have I?" asked Keightley dryly.

"If Monsieur Wilbur stays as long as his friends desire it will be long, but not long enough."

"Thanks so much, but I must get my key."

"You will lunch with me at Aubanel's or the Ré?"

"My mother is here. I must see first what her plans are."

"Or dine?"

There was difficulty in shaking him off, and although Keightley surmounted it, his habitual agility of mind recognised immediately that the Georges Carpenter he used to know — for notwithstanding the difference in their ages they were old acquaintances — would not have needed so much diplomacy

for the shunting. Carpenter was rich and influential, had hosts of friends, retainers, hangers-on; he had no need to seek company, because company sought him. This was an altered and less self-confident man. The explanation must wait, but it was one that no psychologist could afford to miss, however fatigued. Keightley Wilbur required an hour or so alone in his own room, with his bath and barber, valet and manicurist, before he allowed himself seriously to consider the matter. And then, for the coffee had only stimulated and not satisfied his appetite, lunch came next in his programme.

"Go and find out where my mother is lunching, and with whom," he told Kito. Kito came back with the expected report. "Madame is lunching alone, at what hour suits you. She has made no appointment."

"Order a table downstairs, a corner table. Say I'll be with her at one o'clock."

They met in the hall, clearer now of people. Through the glass doors they could see that the luncheon room was full. Keightley congratulated his mother at once on the success of her grey toilette and black hat, guessing correctly the French artist from whose atelier they had emanated. Then he questioned her as to how she had been amusing herself, and asked for all the Monte Carlo gossip. Christmas was really out of season at Monte Carlo, but the people who had villas at Beaulieu and Men-



tone, Cap d'Ail and Roquebrune, were many of them in residence, and Mrs. Wilbur told him she had had no difficulty in getting bridge. She told him also that she had motored to Cannes and lunched at the Golf Club, finding the Grand Duke surrounded with sycophants as usual, and playing worse golf than ever. She had heard a *bon mot* about one of the new favourites. Some one had asked who he was, and the answer came pat: "He made boots in Montreal, and he licks them here." Keightley, of course, said it was old. He heard, too, a wonderful story that had lasted two seasons about a stolen letter of credit presented with a forged signature. The man's wife was supposed to be the culprit, and an extraordinary complication had sprung up, incriminating an erotic Turk with an English wife, a lame American, and two Italian ladies. They discussed the English wife of the Turk. Keightley pitied and Mrs. Wilbur pretended to envy her.

Then, quite abruptly, à propos of nothing, helping himself to asparagus, and complaining they were serving mayonnaise instead of mousseline sauce, Keightley dropped his interrogation into the conversation.

"And Georges Carpenter? I see he's here. What do they say about him?"

"Georges Carpenter?"

"Yes."

"A big man who gambles to match?"

"As you say."

"Mr. Boyes was speaking of him yesterday. He pointed him out to me at the Sporting Club. He put the maximum en plein, and all round 34, and the number came up three times . . ."

"Boyes is the fellow who runs that green paper, isn't he? An able man who knows everything and says nothing. I suppose Devenish introduced him to you?"

"Yes, and he has been so kind."

"What did he tell you about Carpenter?"

"All about his wife; how sad her death was. Mr. Boyes says the man is completely altered."

"Remind me. Who was Carpenter's wife? There was a story, wasn't there? I believe I'm growing old, my memory is failing . . ."

"She was said to be the most beautiful woman in France. A Russian duke kept her at one time, and lavished amazing jewellery upon her. Among other things a necklace of pearls, the finest in the world, each one perfect and perfectly matched. It is supposed to be worth three hundred thousand pounds."

"Oh, yes, of course! I begin to remember. All Paris laughed when Georges Carpenter married her. She called herself 'La Vallière.' I saw her with him once in the Bois de Boulogne. From the red upholstered car gleamed the dead white face and

green sphinx-eyes, scarlet painted lips, and a miraculous throat and curve . . . She isn't dead — surely she isn't dead?"

"Yes. Mr. Boyes said the story was in all the London papers, but I suppose we missed it. They were spending their honeymoon in a motor-houseboat on the Seine. One incredibly hot night, so Georges Carpenter told the jury, unable to sleep, his wife went on deck, dressed only in a *crêpe-de-chine* nightgown, but wearing the famous necklace of pearls, from which she was never parted. No one ever saw her again alive. When the houseboat servants woke in the morning she had mysteriously disappeared. The day afterwards the body, with the pearl necklace still round her neck, was picked up by some peasants on the banks of the river. Paris was very excited over the affair, and long journalistic reports appeared describing the pathetic finding of the beautiful corpse by the peasants and their reverent handling of it. There was an inquest, and the jury found that she must have fallen asleep, and either walked or fallen off the boat, which was in motion at the time."

"And what became of the necklace?"

"When her will was read, it was discovered she had left everything to her husband except the necklace. She desired it should never be removed from her neck, but buried with her."

"And was it?"

"Yes. Mr. Carpenter insisted; he was heart-broken at her death."

"You were very interested in all this?"

Keightley was curious to know what his mother thought of Georges Carpenter.

"Very. I think he is far the most interesting person here, in addition to being the biggest gambler, which, of course, attracts us all to watch him. He has a fine head."

"About as handsome as a bull-dog."

"He isn't all French."

"I believe his mother was an Englishwoman and his father a Moor; so perhaps that is not surprising."

"You don't really know him, do you?"

"Intimately. But I had forgotten his marriage until you reminded me, and about his houseboat. So he was heart-broken."

"I believe you know more about it than I do."

"No, I don't. Only about the man himself. He kept open house in Paris whilst I was living there. It was rather the thing to be seen with him; and at twenty-three one does 'the thing.' You must either follow the fashions or set them. I followed them then. Whether Georges was at home or not (or in bed, as he was the last time I dined there), his friends and the friends of his friends used to drop

in and stay. He was a curious mixture of the Western and Oriental. There were more stories about him and women than there is time for the telling. He had already been divorced twice. I'm not sure it wasn't three times. . . . Have you finished? Won't you have a liqueur? What are you going to do — bridge, or a flutter?"

"I made no engagements."

"I thought you wouldn't. The new rooms are open, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes. I have your ticket."

"The weather is so beastly, or we might drive. Would you like to meet Carpenter? He has asked me to dine with him to-night, and I can easily arrange it."

"You must not mind about me, dear, nor let me interfere with your pleasures here."

"Absurd! Would you like to meet Carpenter?"

"Very much."

"Get a fourth then, will you? I'll order the food. Something young and flapperish; I want to relax my mind."

"Madame de Zippincourt is here with her girls. I'll ask one of them, or Marguerite Roades."

"The Zippincourt by preference. Marguerite is much too good to be amusing."

Georges Carpenter expressed himself charmed at the prospect of meeting the mother of his brilliant

friend Mr. Keightley Wilbur. He transferred the pleasure of being host; but only upon the understanding that it was to be his turn next.

And the *parti carré* that took place in the restaurant of the Hôtel de Paris that evening under the immediate personal surveillance of Monsieur Fleury proved all that such a party should be.

Mrs. Wilbur, exquisitely dressed, cultured, fluent, easy, was entirely to Georges Carpenter's eclectic taste. He talked literature and chiffons equally well, explained the system by which he was already achieving a notable success, and promised to initiate her into the mysteries of roulette if she would honour him later by taking a seat beside him. As for Keightley, he lavished on the brilliant and youthful brunette beside him some quite new and valuable epigrams before he discovered that they were being wasted. Afterwards he went as far as circumstances permitted in the way of flirtation, and found himself met more than half-way. Madame de Zippincourt was practically a professional beauty, and her daughter had profited by example if not by precept.

After dinner they lounged in the hall for coffee; but half-past ten saw them already passing down the long official-guarded corridor that leads from the Hôtel de Paris to the Sporting Club. As Georges Carpenter entered the club with his party quite a little excitement was immediately manifest.

The croupiers at the *trente-et-quarante* table, who had been leisurely separating the six packs of cards, accelerated their pace, and the *chef de parti* watched with some anxiety to see what game the big punter would elect to play. The same interest was displayed at the two roulette tables. The room seemed to fill quickly with beautiful women in yet more beautiful clothes and men of every nationality in evening dress, many of them wearing orders. There is an extraordinary pretence of exclusiveness about this club, to which the greatest scoundrels in Europe can easily obtain admission with the gorgeously apparelled ladies of their choice, but where an ambassador's wife has been known to be refused, and an eminent scientist queried. The one wore glasses and plainly banded hair; the other, careless of clothes, committed the hopeless indiscretion of a ready-made tie. The proprietor wishes the place to attract by reason of its glitter; he has no other standard, and so is able to attain the simplicity of his ideal.

"What is it that you like best to play?" Georges Carpenter asked, and Mrs. Wilbur admitted to a partiality for the adventurousness of the little ball.

Georges Carpenter found her a seat and one for himself beside her. He flung a hundred-franc *plaque* on thirty-four. The ball whirred, clicked home in zero. Carpenter shrugged his shoulders

nonchalantly as the piece was raked away, and settled down to play seriously.

Keightley, when he had restored the too flighty flapper to her beautiful mother, found himself taking what he called a psychological interest, not in Georges Carpenter's system, but in the man himself. He soon saw that vanity rather than greed was the predominant passion. Carpenter liked to have people watching his play, liked to be the centre of the crowd; he plunged not so much to win as to feel the sibilant suspense when the ball faltered and spurted and stopped. *Trente, deux, rouge, pair* and *passe*. This time he had eight thousand francs to receive, next time and the next and the next he lost everything. For an hour he staked maximums, winning and losing, but the latter more largely.

"It doesn't go to-night. There are nights when the table is perverse." He shrugged his shoulders, gathered together what money remained to him and rose.

"You had a bad time?" Keightley asked. Again he shrugged his huge shoulders.

"It comes and goes," he answered, as he passed to the *trente-et-quarante* table, and started again with his rouleaux of notes. Mrs. Wilbur, who only punted an occasional louis, soon tired of the gambling. Keightley, after he had seen her back to the lift, returned to continue his observations. He heard that Georges Carpenter had had the same ill-



luck at the *trente-et-quarante* table as at the roulette.

"Not that it matters to him; he's as rich as Cræsus. He must draw at least forty thousand pounds a year from *L'Après Midi*." *L'Après Midi* was the title of the newspaper Carpenter ran in Paris.

"No one is ever as rich as poorer men suppose," Keightley answered sententiously to his informant, a young diplomat with a foxy face and receding chin, who went on:

"He has gone into the baccarat room now. Will you come? There's a chance of making a bit. *Banque ouverte*, you know. He's got the needle, and is playing it up."

"Has he been losing all the time?"

"Difficult to tell! At first he was supposed to have won a fortune; the last few days he has certainly dropped some, if not all of it."

At four that morning, after a mighty and prolonged duel between banker and punter, Georges Carpenter gave up the bank. At the beginning of the séance he had insisted that the place beside him should be reserved for "Madame," and this, too, was of interest to Keightley. "Madame," better known as "Blanchette," was a young Parisian with prominent cheek-bones, red-patched, and large, deep-set consumptive eyes. Her meagreness was exquisitely dressed, and one saw the bones of her neck and chest through chains of diamonds set *à jour*.

"She has *rivières* of emeralds and rubies, sapphires, everything but pearls. You never see her with a pearl of any sort, not even a ring. They say Carpenter can't bear the sight of a pearl since 'La Vallière' died," the young diplomat told Keightley. "A couple of hundred thousand pounds' worth, and buried with her! I call that a tragedy, a far greater tragedy than her death."

"You would," answered Keightley, as he moved away.

Keightley, Georges Carpenter, Blanchette, and a few other people left the club together. They talked in the lifts, as the custom is at gambling places, of the evening play and the varying luck. It was by the purest accident Keightley Wilbur heard Blanchette, in the confusion of a buzz of good-nights, say softly to Georges Carpenter:

"Everything is *en train*. You will telegraph in the morning."

"It seems there is no help for it." He shrugged his great shoulders. "I have done my best. Kismet; it is fate."

It will be remembered Georges Carpenter had insisted that he should be host to the Wilburs in *revenge* for the dinner at the Hôtel de Paris. Keightley had a letter early in the morning reminding him of this promise.

"Will you and your charming mother give me

the pleasure of your company at Ciro's this evening at eight o'clock?"

Georges Carpenter's dinner that night was made memorable, among other things, by the presence of the best Monte Carlo could boast in the way of beauty and fashion. Madame de Zippincourt and her daughters were there, Lady Drew and Lady Nairn, the two lovely Englishwomen who had come in that morning on Lord Nairn's yacht, a distinguished French poet, and Lord Evensleydale. The dinner was worthy of the occasion, including everything both in and out of season. And the host was worthy of his guests. He had known who to seat by whom in order to promote conversation, launching a word here and there that had the same effect as the sticks used abroad for restoring effervescence to champagne; forgot no one's taste, ignored no one's prejudices, was sufficiently brilliant to inspire the others and not sufficiently so to eclipse them. The central table in the famous restaurant was laden with exotic flowers. A bunch of long-stemmed red American Beauty roses had been provided for each of the ladies. Naturally this table was the cynosure of all eyes, and when one of the little uniformed page-boys of the Hôtel de Paris approached the host bearing a telegram on a silver salver many people besides his guests saw Georges Carpenter change colour as he read it, get up from his seat excitedly,

resuming it, however, after a moment's pause. After that it seemed as if he played the part of host with difficulty, as if all the colour and sparkle had gone out of the entertainment.

When the ladies left for the cloak-room — for, of course, they were all going on to the Sporting Club — Georges Carpenter became communicative. Keightley was near him, and Mr. Boyes, the editor of the little *Monte Carlo* paper without which no one begins the day.

"I have had dreadful news." He seemed overwhelmed by it, unable to go on. "It cannot long be kept a secret." He showed the crushed-up telegram in his hand, and both men, reading, emitted an exclamation of shock or sympathy.

"I must go at once. The miscreants, the malefactors!" Georges Carpenter seemed beside himself with grief and shock. "You will explain, you will make my excuses, but they will understand."

Keightley and the editor of the *Monte Carlo Gazette* promised Carpenter that his guests should be duly informed of what had occurred, bade him regard nothing but his own convenience, assisted as far as they were able in covering his retreat. Carpenter said he must start for Paris that night, at once, that if need be he should charter a special train.

"An attempt has been made to rifle his wife's grave," Mr. Boyes explained to the guests. "Fortunately the thieves were disturbed before they had

time to effect an entry, but the guardian of the cemetery saw the men, who fled at his approach. Mattocks or picks had been left behind, proving their felonious intent."

Later on, and when Keightley was talking to his mother for self-expression and not for publication, he said thoughtfully:

"Carpenter seemed most extraordinarily cut up about it. Could not have been more so if it had been a feat instead of a blunder. I wonder *why* I thought the thing didn't ring quite true, the grief and the shock and all the rest of it. Of course, he is a dramatic sort of chap. I seemed to smell the stage. . . ."

"You have naturally a suspicious mind," Mrs. Wilbur answered consolingly. "The poor thing's pearls were buried with her; I can't imagine anything more probable than that an attempt should have been made to get hold of them. All the papers said they were worth between two and three hundred thousand pounds."

"I had not forgotten."

"You know you are on holiday," she reminded him.

"This thing has begun to haunt me. There is drama in it, and surprise. Only last night Blanchette asked him if everything was *en train*. What was it that had to be *en train*? You don't want to go to the club, do you? I must talk. It

is beautifully warm. Let us have coffee outside."

And when it had been served, he went on:

"Listen, mater! Try and follow my mind. A year or so ago Georges Carpenter, who, by the way, has already had two wives, both of whom divorced him, falls passionately in love with the notorious 'La Vallière,' and makes himself the laughing-stock of Paris by marrying her. There are scenes, quarrels, jealousy. All Paris watches, and Blanchette, 'La Vallière's' dearest friend and companion, is hard put to keep the peace between them. Peace is patched up, and the three of them agree to spend the summer in a houseboat or yacht. Now, I've a little experience of my own—but we need not go into that. Anyway, La Vallière falls overboard, or is pushed overboard."

"Keightley, what are you saying? There was never any suggestion of such a thing."

She was almost indignant.

"Oh! yes, there were a good many suggestions that everybody heard except the coroner's jury. Boyes omitted to mention them to you, but he has been much less reticent with me. When La Vallière's will was opened, it was found she had left everything to Georges Carpenter, *except* the pearls. And the 'everything' proved to be debts, obligations. Thousands had passed through her hands, even hundreds of thousands. But these women grudge themselves nothing. The pearls were really

La Vallière's fortune, and they were to be buried with her. *Tout Paris* chuckled, but left off chuckling to whisper and shrug when the dead woman's furs and jewellery, clothes and bibelots were put up to auction, and sold on public sale."

"You knew nothing of all this when you came here. Why, it was I who told you the story!"

"I know; but I remembered afterwards that it was not new to me. And since then I have been gathering information."

"Don't tell me any more of your suspicions; I really cannot bear it; he is such an admirable host, the most agreeable of men. You have not been up to my sitting-room, have you? It is absolutely crammed with flowers, and he sent me also *marrons glacés*. Don't try and find out things to Georges Carpenter's discredit." She shivered a little. "I want to forget everything that is dreadful."

"Poor old mater! I forgot." He was then silent quite a long time. Afterwards, until he took her back to the hotel and left her at her bedroom door, he talked of other things; gossipy, pleasant things that could not perturb her.

The French newspapers the next morning were full of the attempted outrage of La Vallière's grave. Blanchette, who remained in Monte Carlo and accessible, told Keightley that her nerves had given way entirely — that she was unable to sleep.

"They will not let her rest in her grave, my poor,

poor friend! It is for the pearls; I told Georges so often that it was not safe . . . but he is *sentimental*, that big Georges!"

Keightley was deeply sympathetic, and felt it his duty that Blanchette should not have too many lonely hours. He sensed a mystery, though he could not define it. The few words he had overheard her whisper to Georges Carpenter, the man's change of demeanour, the surprise of the telegram and hasty departure for Paris titillated, without satisfying, Keightley Wilbur's appetite for mystery. That there was a story behind the verdict on La Vallière he had no longer a doubt, and ever it became more certain that it was a story he must learn. He had meant to take no more interest in such things, but his curiosity tortured him. That Blanchette held the clue to the mystery he had no doubt. Yet in the end he had to admit she withheld it successfully. She would dine with him, wine with him, accept his compliments and even more substantial tokens of his regard when the tables proved unkind. She would motor with him, lunch *à deux* at La Reserve in Beaulieu, even sup at the "Carlton" or the "Austria." But she shuddered at the mention of La Vallière's name; her exquisite sensibility was unable to bear any allusion to what had occurred upon the yacht, that "happy, happy time that ended so fearfully." She could not speak about it nor about the pearls, only upon the outrage to the grave was she



voluble, trying apparently to elicit Keightley's opinion as to what would happen to the miscreants. "They will be found — surely they will be found?" And she said vehemently and often that no punishment would be sufficient for them.

But they were not found. The Parisian papers were full of the desecration and the correspondence columns were choked with criticisms and condemnation of the Père la Chaise authorities; apparently the police were completely baffled. Georges Carpenter remained in Paris. To an experienced eye it became apparent that Blanchette was uneasy at his delay; also that her fine disregard of money, the lavishness of her expenditure, the *insouciance* with which she piled her plaques upon the red and the black wavered and diminished. Economy she did not understand, but she was no longer absolutely reckless. And often, too often it seemed, she spoke of his delay, queried its genesis, exhibiting her impatience.

"You care for him so much?" Keightley asked her curiously. She shrugged her shoulders.

"Mon ami, we must always care for millionaires."

"Is he a millionaire?" She looked at him, and he thought then her eyes were startled, that there was even fear in their dark depths.

"But, of course . . ."

"I did not know."

"Everybody knows," she said crossly.

"You think I might be able to raise a loan from him when he returns?" he asked carelessly, smiling. She took offence, said she did not understand his *plaisanteries*. Monsieur Carpenter could lend what he liked, it was no affair of hers.

A queer new light was thrown on the position by a paragraph that appeared without comment in the little green Monte Carlo newspaper:

*"M. Georges Carpenter, fearing a second attempt on the grave of his wife — the 'Grave of the Pearls,' to give it the colloquial title — has applied to the authorities for permission to remove and place in safe custody the treasure which has already proved so fatal an attraction."*

When Georges Carpenter reappeared at Monte Carlo he was a little subdued in manner, his mourning even deeper than before, and he expressed to Keightley and Mr. Boyes at least an utter inability to talk of the "affair."

"It is dreadful, too dreadful, to think how nearly they had succeeded. The ruffians, the miscreants, who would not let her lie in her grave, the poor girl! But it will never happen again, it must never happen again. I have arranged ——"

He could not finish nor tell them what he had arranged, he was too overcome by his feelings. It was, however, noticeable that he and Blanchette were

no longer on the best of terms. They argued and disputed, almost in public, they seemed to exasperate each other as two partners in a confederation of crime. At least, that is the way Keightley explained it; he was never tired of watching them. Only when gambling could Georges Carpenter keep his grief at bay. And soon, very soon, he was gambling higher than before. Harpy-like, Blanchette sat or stood beside him, sullen, enraged, or voluble; he could neither evade nor elude her.

Keightley Wilbur, who had to talk, and to talk of what interested him, had only one topic — the Vallière pearls. His mother was his unwilling confidante. She thought she was to have had a holiday from horrors when she came abroad, but he scarcely left her time for her afternoon rubber.

"A millionaire might afford to let three hundred thousand pounds lie in a grave. A half-ruined gambler with an expensive mistress had to devise some other course." They were lunching at the Ré, and all he said was interspersed with culinary matter.

"Half-ruined gambler!"

"No less. Don't let your cotelettes get cold; there are soufflé potatoes and petits pois. You remember the failure of the Peruvian Discount Bank. Carpenter was up to his neck in that affair. Everybody knows his paper has been doing badly ever

since. He has not lost less than a hundred thousand francs a day since we have been here. I've been watching. . . ."

"But what has all this to do with the rifling of his wife's grave? He was actually here when it happened. You let yourself be carried away."

"I don't. I go voluntarily. There are half a dozen stories in this story — tragedy, comedy, farce. If you miss these *crêpes Suzettes* you will regret them, not once, but all your life. I shan't go on if you don't eat. Eat and I'll talk. Did you ever think of reconstructing the crime — the French way, and not a bad one? La Vallière must have come on deck that night, after having discovered them together, her friend and her lover, after an unforgettable scene. Before that she had been suspicious, jealous. She was dying of consumption and had prepared her revenge — the revenge of which they knew nothing, neither false lover nor false friend. She was supposed to be rich, but of all the wealth she had had at her command only the pearls remained. And they were to be buried with her. Georges carried out her bequest; he had no choice; all Paris was looking on . . ."

"What do you call this?" Mrs. Wilbur was looking at the dish the waiter brought her.

"*Crêpes Suzettes*. Don't miss them, mater; they are a speciality of the house." But he could not be lured from his topic.

"I see it all so clearly. Blanchette has been illuminatingly reticent, and her maid is enchanted with Kito. Have another *crêpes Suzette*. I'm glad they are not called *crêpes Blanchette*. I wonder why, by the way? The remark was an absurd one? Carpenter has been growing poorer and poorer all this year; Blanchette is little less extravagant than La Vallière. It was she who suggested the scheme — a woman's scheme, surely. The pearls must be recovered! The pickaxe, the attempted ravishment of the grave was necessary to the plot."

"But he was here," she said again.

"Even reputed millionaires need not do their own dirty work. And there was so little to be done. Not even to rifle a grave, only to make a few strokes with a pickaxe; to drop some tools."

"Keightley, you are really uncanny; you are spoiling my appetite."

"Mine is often shattered after an excellent lunch. But don't go." For she had risen. "Wait for coffee. I know you are longing to get to the Casino; but wait for coffee."

"You have curdled my blood."

"The coffee and a liqueur will put it right."

"I don't know what makes you think of such things."

"It is not difficult to commit homicide on a houseboat. *Experto crede!*"

"What *do* you mean?"

"Nothing. Another story. Come, will you believe all I have told you if the pearls are sold — sold quite soon? Not stored at a bank, as he says? He has secured a great blast of publicity for his announcement that he will put them in safe custody. But if he *should* sell them? What shall you say if he sells them?"

"I don't know. I don't know what to think or believe; you take me into such strange, violent worlds . . ."

"Poor mater! I seemed dragged into them myself."

Glancing at her, he saw she looked pale. Her pallor reminded him of the past, of all that she had done for him when Louis de Brissac committed suicide. He felt a sudden pang of remorse. His passionate curiosity about crime and criminals had disturbed, distracted both their lives — lives that should have been calm and serene, devoted to literature and art.

His mother's face reproached him. She had not enjoyed her lunch; and last night at dinner had been the same. They were to have had a holiday together, but this was no holiday for her.

It came upon him suddenly that she did not wish to listen, to hear any more of Georges Carpenter or La Vallière, of Blanchette or the pearls. He had never prided himself upon being a good son. With such a mother, who could be otherwise? But her

face reproached him, and he knew, since she did not wish to listen, he must leave off talking.

"Pull yourself together, mater; you are looking tired, bored. You were right when you said this was to have been a holiday. I meant to wait, to watch, to enjoy talking about the raid to him, or to her; drawing them out, alarming them, soothing them, until, perhaps, I became their confidant. I meant to see their furtive faces, watch whilst their mutual passion turned to mutual hate, to see the play played out." The bill was brought to him, and he scanned it carelessly. "I don't know how they do it at the price! *Ciro* couldn't have given us better food. And we were so much quieter here." His *douceur* was large. "You understand, don't you? I am going to throw it up. We are going to get out of this place."

"The Ré?"

"Monte Carlo. I am going to take you back to the hotel now. Have everything packed."

"But, Keightley, this is nonsense." Her resistance was feeble. "I don't want you to sacrifice yourself, or your curiosity, to me. Go on watching if you want to. Find out what has become of the pearls. I *am* tired to-day; perhaps I was inattentive. But that was only the weather — the *mistral* is threatening." She was alarmed that she should have failed him, shown her distaste for what interested him. All the way to the hotel she remon-

strated and demurred, said she did not wish to go away; she wished him to satisfy his curiosity.

"But I want to sacrifice myself and my curiosity. Don't balk me. I so seldom have a moral impulse. This is one, I am sure. I erase from my mind La Vallière, Blanchette, Carpenter, and the pearls. I am no longer Keightley Wilbur, the world-renowned criminal investigator. I am Keightley Wilbur, the devoted son. We are off to-day to Ventimiglia, to Nervi and Santa Margherita, to Florence, Venice, Capri. There *are* no crimes."

He carried through his project, overruling her faint, half-hearted objections. This — this was the price he would pay for what she had done for Louis de Brissac. Never, never would he know if Georges Carpenter sold the pearls, the pearls that were not safe in the grave where their owner had wished them to remain.

So he thought, reckoning without that one prime mover in affairs: coincidence, and the play of circumstance. Pleased with his self-sacrifice he alluded to it frequently, taking credit to himself as he acted as courier to the easiest and most appreciative of travelling companions.

The London season was well under way when Keightley Wilbur and his mother came back to Carlton House Terrace. They were in time for the second Drawing Room, but arrears of hospitality had



to be made up; Mrs. Wilbur, at least, took her social duties seriously. Receptions, dinner parties and charity concerts followed in quick succession. Our English royalties were difficult to secure for private individuals this first year of the new reign, and a weakness for royalty was among Mrs. Wilbur's few failings. She compromised on foreign potentates, and few of the entertainments she gave were without the little line "to meet Prince and Princess Augustin," or "the Baroda of Hindoochoatan," or, as on the immediate occasion to be related, "to meet the Grand Duke Fedor and the Countess Morvay."

Keightley, of course, could not let the opportunity slip, and chaffed her about "Tartar Emetic," which moved her not in the least from her pleasurable anticipation of the event. Everybody who was anybody had accepted, there were twenty-four to dinner and a reception to follow. The house was decorated with black and yellow orchids, and the dinner-table a marvel of crystal and silver, laid in a background of St. Andrew's Cross carried out flatly in blue and white flowers.

The Grand Duke was tall, bearded, typical. He spoke English admirably, but what he said in the admirable English was overbearing, egotistic, lacking tact and discretion. So long as his charmingmorganatic wife and the other ladies remained at table there was, however, little in his behaviour to excite reprobation. He sat on the right hand of

his hostess, and the exquisitely pretty woman on his other side bore with the practised equanimity of a Frenchwoman the jokes that were more coarse than humorous, the compliments, familiarities and methods to which many winters at Cannes had used her. For Cannes is almost a preserve of the Grand Duke, and he is suffered there, if not gladly, at least with toleration.

It was only after the ladies had left the table, when Keightley moved from his seat in order to take charge of his mother's principal guest, that Duke Fedor began to show his quality. The wine had pleased his palate, the cigars were Upmann Coronas, the little Frenchwoman had been both beautiful and amiable. It was perhaps not unnatural that the ducal tongue should run rather more loosely than ever an English dining-room permits. Keightley at first was rather inclined to encourage the talk. His taste was outraged, but that was nothing in comparison with the satisfaction of his prejudices. He pressed the famous Wilbur port that had been laid down by his grandfather, and presently, shooting a bow at a venture, brought down an unexpected quarry.

"Who was the most beautiful woman I ever met — the most beautiful?" The big face grew lustful under the shaded electric lights, through the smoke haze. "Ah, of that there can be no doubt. I have met many beauties in my day, but La Vallière!"

He passed his glass automatically decanterwards; words came from him, passionate, unprintable. One or two of the other guests exchanged glances, but, drunk or sober, a Grand Duke must not be gainsaid. He could call up the dead to garnish an after-dinner half-hour. If Keightley was shocked he did not show it. The name of La Vallière conjured up remembrances, curiosity. He leaned forward.

"La Vallière! Of course. And Blanchette, I knew her friend Blanchette."

"Pfui! Pfui for Blanchette!" The "pfui" represents more unprintable matter. The Grand Duke flicked the cigar ash with his over-jewelled finger. It was only then it flashed upon Keightley that this was the donor of the famous pearls. He grew excited. How was he to bring the conversation to the jewels, to the mystery of their fate, to Georges Carpenter, and the sequel of the story he once ached to hear, that he again ached to hear?

"You admired her? Hein! But you should have known her mistress. Mistress, yes. Blanchette was lady's maid to La Vallière. At first she was in the kitchen, before that in the gutter. That *scélérat*, Carpenter . . . !"

"Are you talking of Georges Carpenter?" interposed David Devenish. "Just as I left the office the news came in that he had shot himself." •

Keightley made an exclamation, but the Grand Duke heard the news calmly.

"Shot himself? The best thing he could do. Carrion! He was carrion, that man."

"And what will become of the pearls — the famous pearls that he put into safe keeping?"

Keightley could not help it, the words seemed forced from him. Carpenter dead and the fate of the pearls undecided! Never now would he learn if he had guessed correctly, if his *flair* for crime had left him.

"The pearls — the pearls for the sake of which he murdered La Vallière, for the sake of which he and Blanchette made away with the most beautiful woman of the twentieth century? But, my friend, the pearls were no longer his. For such *canaille* as those two such pearls as these were not."

"You know what has become of them," Keightley asked quickly. The Duke gave that hoarse laugh of his.

"But who better? Look!"

And, looking, Keightley saw that in the Duke's dress-shirt there were three pearls, three resplendent and lustrous pearls of a size and shape transcending anything he had ever seen before. It would not have been Keightley if, at the same moment that he recognised their quality and was thrilled with his nearness to the secret he had pursued, he had not said to himself that in this season it was only a Grand Duke who *could* wear three studs in his shirt.

"These are three of the smallest; the others are again in my cabinet."

"Carpenter sold them back to you?"

Again the Duke laughed.

"I know not who sold them, only that I bought them."

"But so soon!"

"Her skin was like those pearls, warm and lustrous . . . at night-time by candle-light it would shine. . . ."

"Would you care to join the ladies? My mother has guests who look forward to the privilege of meeting you."

But when the reception was over and the last guest had left, alone with his mother in that vast drawing-room, with its orange flowers and the black eagles, Keightley said:

"Are you entertaining any more Grand Dukes this season?"

"I am not sure. We might get Boris. It was a success, wasn't it? Fedor has a great charm, don't you think? Affable, and yet in some ways extraordinarily dignified. You liked him?"

"Immensely. But if you secure Boris, I should like you to let me know in time. There is most attractive salmon fishing in Norway."

"You didn't like him!" she exclaimed.

"Did you notice the studs he wore?"

"What woman could fail to notice them." Her fingers strayed to her own historic and beautiful necklace. "They were larger and more perfect than any of mine."

"They are the smallest from the famous La Vallière necklace."

"What!"

"They were not safe in her grave — not safe in the bank."

"Georges Carpenter sold them?"

"It seems so." Keightley yawned. "You should have heard your charming Grand Duke tell the story. Late, isn't it? I'm off to bed."

"But ——"

"No, no, I can't talk any more to-night; I've exhausted my amiability."

"La Vallière's pearls! Georges Carpenter sold them!"

"Just so, *or* Blanchette. Good night. I feel a little tired."

"Then you were right?"

"Yes. But I'm tired of being always right."

## EPILOGUE

THE affair of La Vallière and the pearls was the last occasion upon which Keightley Wilbur was known to take any interest in what went on in coroners' courts. At this time tragedy came into his own life — tragedy so strange, incredible and absorbing, that for a time at least it left no room nor space for other consideration.

He fell ill. An acute attack of pleurisy supervened on many late nights and imprudences, and quite suddenly, with no warning, the young criminologist found himself in the throes of almost unbearable pain. The illness deepened, pneumonia sapped what little strength the pleurisy had left; he could hardly move in bed. But his mind was still alert, and he insisted upon being told the ingredients of each medicine, the object of each palliative. There came a day when Dr. Ince felt it his duty to admit there was danger in his condition. A vessel gave way in the lung and a pneumo-thorax developed. Keightley, speaking with difficulty and in high temperature, demanded the truth and rejected it when presented to him. Irregularly, with pauses and difficult short breath, he said:

"Absurd! It's impossible. To snuff me out — *me!* The powers know better than that. The

chorus can be dismissed, but not the leading comedian. I play a part for which there is no understudy."

"Don't agitate yourself." A morphia injection had not long been administered. "Lie still — lie perfectly still, my dear fellow. You know I am doing all that is possible."

"I am the idol of my mother's heart; the expression is jejune, perhaps. That's the temperature. Delete it, but the fact remains. I have critics, but no enemies. You're a fool, Ince, a fool." The cough shook him.

"You asked me to tell you the truth."

"But I don't believe it, mind you! 'I wonder what I was begun for since I am so quickly done for.' I've so much more to say — to write. Danger! To be in danger! It sounds so strange. Death! At least one would be out of pain."

He spoke less audibly now, slurring his words.

"You are not in pain now?" Dr. Ince asked anxiously.

"Under the morphia I am conscious of pain. And I breathe shallowly." The brightness of his eyes was dulled, although not the brightness of his intellect. "Don't give me more than you can help. I want to think."

"It would be better if you left off thinking, made your mind a blank."

"I know, but there is something at the back of



this — this illness and suffering; something is eluding me that I want to get hold of. Help me if you can. What have I done?" His flushed face rose slightly from the pillow, he spoke feverishly.

"You really ought not to talk. I am going away now. I'll look in again this afternoon."

"Don't bring any more consultants. They take liberties with me and my new silk jackets. They give me cold. The morphia is working now, Ince. I am getting more comfortable, breathing easier. A good drug. Is it in the papers — about my illness, I mean? What do they say?"

"All the papers have it; there have been so many inquiries we've been obliged to put up a bulletin."

"Sinking?"

Ince laughed. "Oh no, we haven't come to that yet. I hope we never shall. I wish I could persuade you to have a nurse."

"Kito is better than forty nurses. I forget the quotation — '*He slumbers not nor sleeps.*'"

The painful cough interrupted again, broke hoarsely through the morphia film. Kito glided in, lifted his master into a more comfortable position, held him until the paroxysm was over. It was true that no one could have a more competent or devoted nurse. Mrs. Wilbur, too, spent her days and nights between here and the dressing-room.

Ince, when he left the house — full of misgiving, for the temperature was high and many symptoms

alarming — thought how true it was that Keightley Wilbur played a part for which there was no understudy. He was only twenty-seven years of age. As a literary man he had given more than promise. As a criminologist he had made his mark. And although in some cases he had tracked down a criminal, he had never pursued the quest, nor hounded nor expedited such a one to his or her doom. Ince knew many a secret kindness; surreptitious benefactions almost royal. All the doctor's heart was with his patient — his dying patient, for so he feared for him. Mrs. Wilbur's courage and calm, too, had invoked his admiration. It was easy to see that her heart was breaking; every pain of his was an agony of hers.

Yet she smiled often when in the sick room, was ever ready to exchange or provoke quip or crank, cap epigram with paradox; she followed her son's mind all the time.

"The mater has no idea how ill I am," Keightley said, many days ago now. "Don't tell her. Lie to her, lie stoutly." But she knew; none better.

Although in the sick room her voice was even and light, and her tear-filled eyes were surface dry, they were deep sunken, and there were lines about her mouth, lines of mother pangs.

And it was not only his mother. Notwithstanding his egotism and whimsicalities Keightley Wilbur had many friends, people who had penetrated the

shallow surface and found beneath a warm heart, a quick understanding, an almost unparalleled generosity.

That day, that worst bad day, Ince was hardly two hours away from the house. In the afternoon pulse and temperature were worse, breathing and pain no better. On this visit Keightley asked for more morphia, and forgot to inquire what the public were saying about his illness.

"Tell the mater I am better. Send her out, make her play bridge. I know all about it now; it is all my own fault. That damned cliché is true. *Vengeance is mine!*"

He said it twice, feverishly. Later on, before the doctor left, he asked for pencil and paper.

"I might reason it out, put it a different way."

"Is there any one you would like to see?" Ince asked gently.

"Do you mean a priest? No. A typist, perhaps." The dry, burnt lips were working, and the words creaked slowly through. "Why should I want to see anybody? It's my own affair . . . an old story now; I'd forgotten it. *Vengeance is mine.* Leave the paper there; I might feel inclined to write. Curse this pain! I wish you'd go, Ince. I feel rotten."

Ince agreed he would be better alone. Once outside the room he thought of every physician of eminence or renown who had not already been called

in consultation. But Mrs. Wilbur would have none of them.

"They pull him about and fatigue him. I will not have him disturbed again. You are doing all that is possible, I am sure. I have complete confidence in you."

"All that I know." The words were almost a groan — an admission. She looked at him quietly.

"You find him so much worse to-night?"

"The temperature is 105."

"He will not be taken from me. I have faith. There are only us two." And still her voice held and her courage.

When Dr. Ince left him, and the room was in darkness, Keightley Wilbur slept or dreamt, dreamt or slept. He had had three injections of morphia, and the effect was cumulative. For the first time he dreamed that he was dying. In his disorganised sleep he wept for himself; painful tears oozed through hot lids. It was dreadful he should have to die, strange and dreadful when he realised the tears were his own — that he was crying because it was so sad and pitiful he should die; with so much unsaid, leaving such a large, vacant space. . . .

He lost consciousness, and found himself adrift in dark waters, black and cold and deep, drifting here and there. In the distance — the dim distance

— he saw Gates, Gates against which the waters swished with a sibilant, strange sound. Sometimes he thought the sibilant, strange sounds were his own breathing! Then all at once he knew that the gates were the Gates of Silence, and that beyond them lay a house, a House of many Mansions. The words pleased him; he thought they were his own. A House of many Mansions, his Father's house. . . .

He smiled in his sleep because the words pleased him. Again he was on the waters, drifting. He was very tired, with the tiredness which is pain, when every breath is an exhausted sob. Now all that he knew of hope, or that was left to him of desire, was concentrated on the grey Gates and the Mansions beyond. He wanted to drift through and to lie down—to lie down in that House. But always when he was near he drifted back, more tired than any words can relate.

At midnight he opened his eyes and there beside him sat his mother, watching. The fire was low and red in the room and there was no other light.

"Better, dear?" she asked him. "You've had a good sleep." She put the cup of lemonade to his lips, and he drank thirstily.

"Have I been asleep?" he asked vaguely. And in a minute or two: "Did you have a nice game?"

"Very." She had not seen a card since he was ill, but this was not the moment to tell him so. Dr.

Ince had told her, when he woke, it was possible he would wake with his mind wandering.

"Have you been here long?"

"Not very long."

"I am very ill."

"I know, dear; I know."

"More ill than you know. I told them not to tell you."

"My poor boy!" She put her soft hand upon his forehead.

"I am thirsty all the time."

"That is only the morphia; it has nothing to do with the illness. Don't worry about that. There is plenty of lemonade, and it has been well iced." Again she held the cup to his lips.

"You know why it is, why it all is?" His face twitched, and he caught her hand with the cup.

"Try to rest again. I'll sit here. You need not speak; just open your mouth when you want a drink."

"If I hadn't killed Pierre Lamotte. . . ."

Dr. Ince was right; his mind *was* wandering.

"You did not kill Pierre Lamotte, darling; he fell off the houseboat. You have nothing to reproach yourself with; you have been ever the best of loving sons. . . ." Her voice broke. She stopped speaking and took his burning hand, cooled it by laying her cheek upon it.

"He did not fall off; I threw him off," he per-

sisted. His eyes were glittering, fever-bright, and the hoarse words came jerkily. "It was the unwritten law. Are there any unwritten laws, I wonder? We are alone in the room, aren't we? I always wanted you to know, but I could never tell you. I did not mean to kill him. I was smoking opium; he gave me more and more. When I woke, Ellaline was screaming. I found him in her room and threw him out. I thought no more of him than if he'd been a dog. He was a dog to have done such a thing. Mother! can't you help me? Can't you comfort me? I don't want to die . . . just for that."

Something like a sob broke from him and startled her. Was it true? Could it be true, then — this dreadful story he was telling? But she pulled herself together. What mattered if it were true or false? What she had to do was to soothe him, give him rest.

"I have shocked you, you had not thought it possible, me!"

"It does not seem to me to be very important. Can't you put it out of your mind?"

"Help me to think of something else. I can't rest or sleep. And I am so dreadfully tired." He began to go over the story again, insisted upon telling it. Then, when she said it was of no consequence, of no manner of consequence, it seemed as if he slept; the baffling drug held and released him.

"It was manslaughter, mind, not murder," he muttered in his sleep. This sleep lasted longer than any of the others; he seemed to grow more restful, as if his mind had been partly relieved.

And she? She stilled her beating heart; called upon her courage. He was so dear — so dear to her. She could only look; a touch might have disturbed him. Her lips ached to kiss him, her hands to touch him, but she sat quite still and upright. Keightley! He was the heart of her innermost heart. What did it matter if he had committed this crime of which he accused himself?

When he woke again she was quite ready for him. He woke with the same question on his lips:

"What do you think of me now?"

She gave him the drink; then answered lightly:

"Surely you are not letting a little thing like that worry you? I'm surprised you should dwell upon it."

"Why did you bring me up religiously, teach me phrases that come back?"

She smiled into his eyes.

"I didn't, dear. You got them from nurses and governesses and at school." Her coolness calmed and soothed him. It could not be true that he was dying, that he deserved to die.

"I was his jury, judge, and his executioner."

"One man in his time plays many parts."

"How lightly you take it. I never thought of it,



either, when I was well. Is my brain going? Why should I suffer like this, be in pain all the time, unless because of Lamotte?"

She put all her strength into the answer — her mother anguish and her unshed tears. "Your brain is not going; it is confused by morphia. You caught a chill, neglected it, pneumonia and pleurisy came on. One thing has nothing to do with the other — Pierre Lamotte and your illness."

"You comfort me."

"Thank God — thank God!" she said beneath her sobbing breath.

"I can't die — I can't!" It was the weakness of his illness and not he who spoke — weakness, too, that made his eyes fill. He turned toward her. "You couldn't do without me, could you, mammy?"

"No." She had her arms about him now, snuggling him against her as if he had been a baby. "No, I can't do without you."

"I am so tired."

"Rest in my arms."

"Ince said I was in danger. Hold me tight. Don't let me drift away again. Tell me about Pierre."

He was hardly himself, but sufficiently conscious to understand what was said to him. As they lay together she tried to pour her vitality into him, to give him the strength he needed. To hear her speak so quietly and calmly one could not have believed

how her heart beat, and how fear tore and tortured her.

"You are not in danger, darling; you are very ill, but not in danger. Dr. Ince said it to persuade you to have a nurse; he does not think Kito and I are enough for you."

"Lamotte? You know what I did?"

"Yes. You won't think of it when you are stronger. You are going to get quite well. I could not live without you; you know that, heart of my heart, of my innermost heart." It was her only outburst. She went on quietly; her words must reach his inner ear, convince him. "Pierre Lamotte has nothing to do with your illness. You were right in what you did to him — quite right."

"Go on."

"Under the ægis of your roof, the protection of your hospitality, he insulted your guest, outraged your honour."

"You're not reading it, are you? I'm keeping my eyes shut."

"No. I'm holding you in my arms and talking to you. You have always told me not to quote, that quotations mean inability to express oneself."

"I have done it myself since I have been ill."

"I can't express myself well to-night. You are so ill, and it hurts me. . . ."

"Poor mother! But I am better; I am feeling better."

Almost it would seem to be true. His head burned less where it lay against her breast, and no longer was every word a cough.

"‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’—that is the quotation I had in my mind. In righteous indignation you flung him out."

"Unrighteously?" He finished her sentence drowsily. She went on talking, arguing, persuading, in that slow, soft voice of hers. Sometimes he smiled or contradicted; sometimes she thought he slept. She was holding the nightmare back for him, buoying him up with love. The slow night wore on.

"I am very ill." This was said again in one of the sleep intervals. She was still holding him, but answered quietly:

"Not so bad as you think."

She was faint with anxiety, with the fatigue of holding her arm under his head. So stiff when he released her that she found difficulty at first in moving, in getting the feeding-cup; but she did not falter.

"Turn up the light for a minute. Stand where I can see you. You won't look calm if I am worse. Why, you are smiling, happy! You look younger than ever! Turn it off again quickly. It's all right. I'm not going to die at all. I am going to sleep." He turned on his side. "Good night, darling. You're quite right; I only drowned a dog. I'll get my dreams right now."

He was asleep before she got back to the bedside; the effect of the morphia had almost worn off, and it was genuine sleep this time — the turning-point of his illness. The crisis had passed.

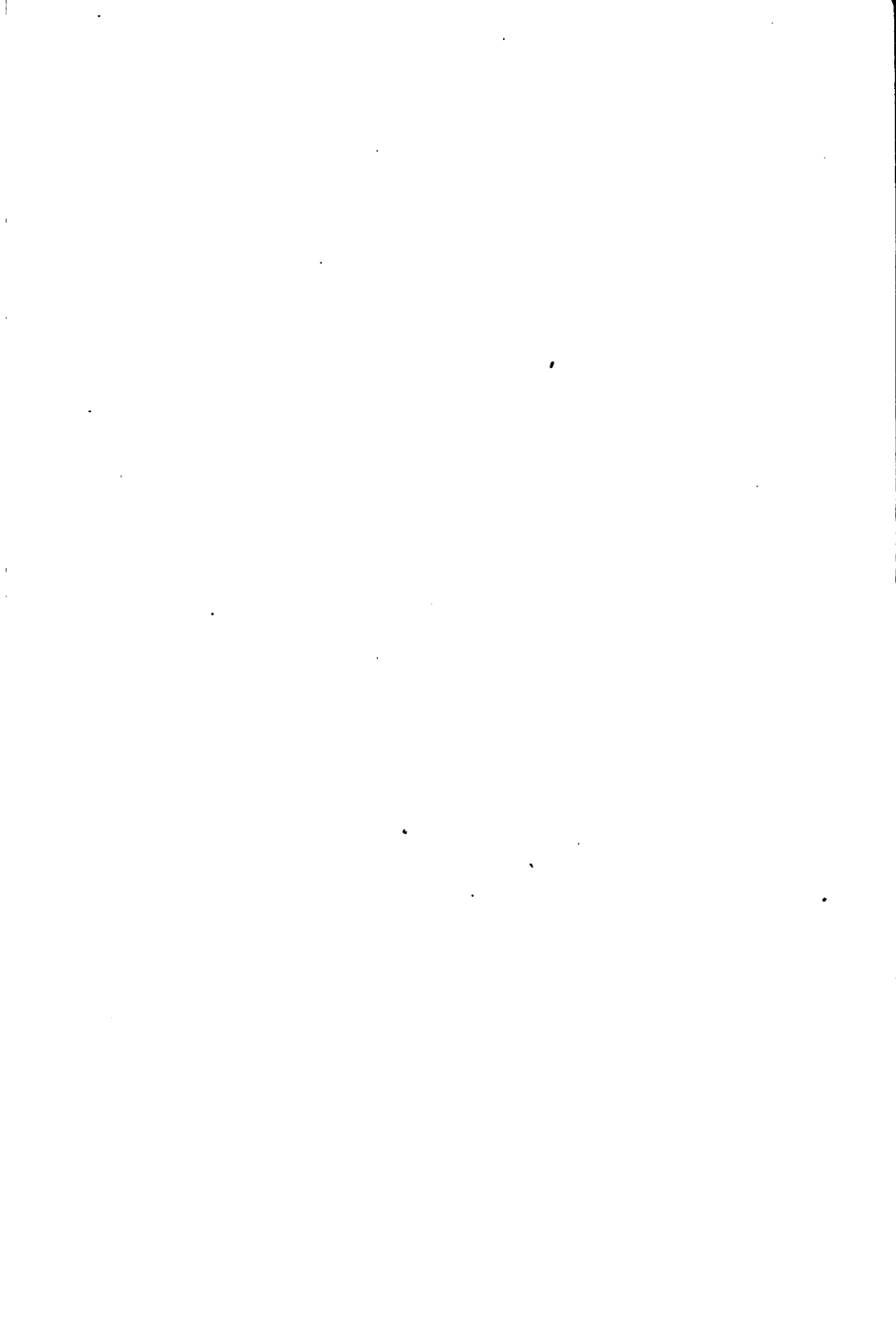
Convalescence was slow, tedious, the weakness hard to fight. It was many weeks before he could bear his mother out of his sight. He was always pressing her to rest, to go out, to play, and always he was preventing her carrying out his instructions. She loved his exactions and his inconsistencies, was only happy when she was exhausting herself in his service. He wanted to write long before he was able. A very flood-tide of inspiration set in; and she must hear each idea that struck him, praise it as being better than the last. Pierre Lamotte's name was not again mentioned between them. But one day when Keightley was on the sofa and Dr. Ince had just left, he said:

"That *cliché*, now, that damned *cliché* is right again. Vengeance is mine. Ince has just told me! He is going to have a rough time, too. We can't escape."

"Who? What?" She was not quickly aware of his meaning.

"Ince. One way or another we've all got to pay, I suppose, all of us unconvicted criminals. *Ince is going to marry an actress.*"

THE END



— Babel hit sick of them

Reconstruct a pane - sort of a philatelic  
cross-word puzzle. Spells name of guy  
1st Lord of P.O.

Polish BkPl a pane

Idea of "bloating" to coin a word is to  
keep other cobs from having stamps.

△ cobs not salvable in \$

Ferrari retribution on Arthur  
Shore

Trade stamps as re enlightened  
BkPl cobs do - never! not de  
vigen, not at all come il fanti.

But so a boy I traded stamps - Well  
you never see a real philatelist both  
but how you've turned out - with my  
ex libris or whatever they are. Besides  
30-40 yrs ago.

Progs today trade? Too being  
as 30-40 yrs ago of it

This book should be returned to  
the Library on or before the last date  
stamped below.

A fine of five cents a day is incurred  
by retaining it beyond the specified  
time.

Please return promptly.

**CANCELLED**  
NOV 9 1978  
NOV 1 1978

